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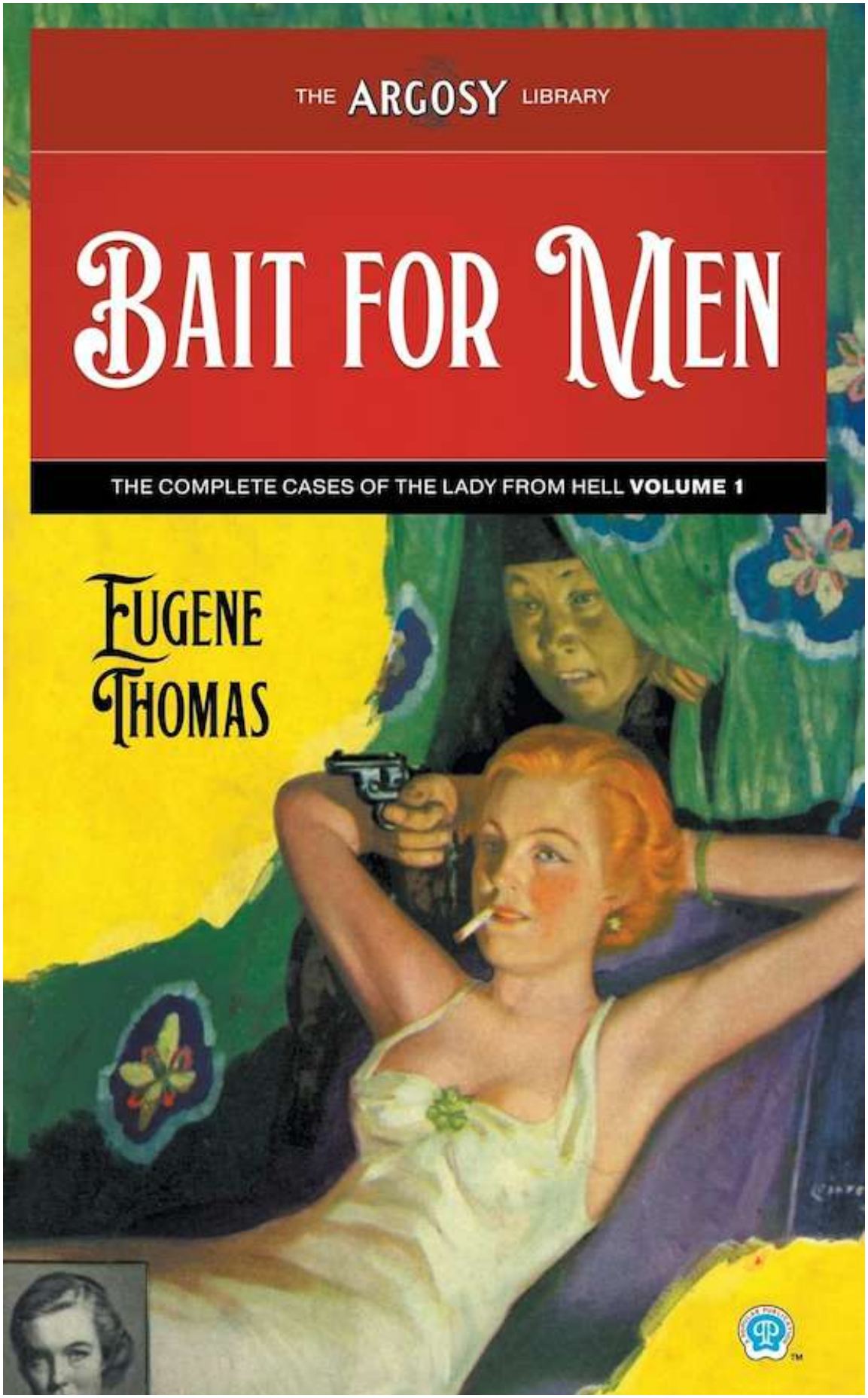
THE COMPLETE CASES OF THE LADY FROM HELL **VOLUME 1**

EUGENE THOMAS



Bait for Men

THE CASES OF THE LADY FROM HELL

Eugene Thomas

The Lady from Hell

by Eugene Thomas

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The LADY from HELL

The Episode of the Secret Service Blackmail

A True Story

By
Eugene Thomas

The steel door behind the painting swung open

From the Fortress of the Bald Doctor with the Yellow Eyes Vivian Legrand Snatches a Letter Worth Three Thousand Pounds

COL. SIR MARK CAYWOOD, Chief of the British Secret Service in the Far East, was an exceedingly worried man on two counts this June night.

The first worry rose from a cablegram in code received that morning from the Viceroy of India giving him to understand, in no uncertain terms, that the Viceroy expected results in the matter that was just then occupying the undivided attention of the secret service as well as causing new wrinkles and gray hair among the higher members of British India officialdom.

The second worry rose from a note

received an hour or so before, signed Mrs. Legrand, and stating that the writer would call at his office at eight that night for an interview of importance. No answer had been requested, and, apparently, none had been expected, the writer taking it for granted that the interview would be granted her.

In his files were several reports on Vivian Legrand, who was wanted in Shanghai in connection with the murder of her father, the notorious Duke Donellan. Under ordinary conditions, Sir Mark would have simply ordered the lady held for the Shanghai police. The matter was not so simple, however. As a matter of fact, Sir Mark did not dare arrest her, for she was present in Rangoon as the guest of a native potentate, the ruling Rajah of Salingar. To arrest his guest would be an offense to the rajah that Sir Mark did not care to commit.

So, as the clock approached eight, he sat alone in his study beneath a madly whirring fan and sweltered and swore. Not once did Sir Mark suspect that there might be a most important connection between that note and the cablegram.

A houseboy appeared like a white wraith. Sir Mark looked up.

"A lady who says that you desire an appointment with her, O Presence."

The colonel stared. The effrontery of the woman, making it appear that the appointment was of his seeking! He did not realize—nor did many another of her victims in later years realize—that Vivian Legrand almost invariably and at once placed the other person on the defensive. It gave her the advantage. The colonel bit his lip, then said slowly, "Show the lady in."

He watched the doorway and presently a figure materialized. He rose—and came out of the shell. His official reports on Vivian Legrand had not prepared him for what he saw. No man could question her beauty. Her red hair caught the shaded light on the colonel's study table and became a quivering flame above the exquisitely modeled, exotic face. The clinging black gown she wore seemed molded to her shapely form.

"You are Mrs. Legrand?"

"I am Mrs. Legrand," Vi responded in the husky contralto that was one of her charms. The smile she bestowed upon him was completely disarming.

"Since I received your note," the colonel told her, settling behind the desk, "I have, if you will pardon me, been more than a little puzzled. I cannot imagine anything that cannot be taken up with my secretary."

"I told you that I wanted to see you regarding a matter of importance."

SHE paused and smiled. Had Sir Mark known what was in her mind at the moment the smile might not have pleased him as much as it did. Vivian Legrand lay back in silence in the long rattan chair, quite at ease, her hands clasped in her lap, chin tilted, eyes looking upon him as a cat's eyes look upon the mouse it is about to play with.

"What happened on the night of June 14th?" she flung at him.

He glared at her, consternation written on his features.

"You don't mean—"

"But I do," she assured him.

He drummed upon the desk.

"You have not answered me," she reminded him after a moment. "Shall I tell *you* what happened that night, and what the consequences are likely to be?"

He raised a hand swiftly. "Please.

These things are best not discussed."

She went on relentlessly. "On the night of June 14th a paper was stolen from your safe . . . a letter that had been written to you by a man named Ivan Stavinsky, a prisoner who had been sentenced for life to the penal colony on the Andaman Islands. If that letter falls into the hands of a certain power to the north of India, it might precipitate a war."

The colonel leaned forward tensely. "You know the contents of that letter?"

"What I know is locked away safely until the time is ripe to bring it forth. Meanwhile, I will say this much. That letter has not left Rangoon."

For a moment Sir Mark sat motionless and expressionless. Then he said briefly:

"Unless you are willing to answer my question truthfully, there is no need to continue the interview further."

She dismissed the implication with a shrug. "Frankly, I do not know the contents," she said. "But I do know where it is."

Instantly he was on his feet. "You do?"

She nodded. "How much is it worth to you if I recover that document, Sir Mark?"

He stared at her in amazement.

"You—recover it? But that is impossible!" He stopped, struck by a sudden thought, and she laughed.

"Wrong, Sir Mark. I am not the person who stole that letter. But I repeat that I know who did—know where it is—and if it is worth—shall we say three thousand pounds to you—you may have it back again."

It was with difficulty that Sir Mark suppressed an impulse to smile. He said soberly:

"I'll confess that I do not know how you learned of this matter. But since you do, won't you be more explicit? To—ah—propose to blackmail the British Secret Service seems rather incredible."

In her turn, Vivian Legrand suppressed an impulse to smile. She wondered what Sir Mark would say were

VIVIAN LEGRAND

she to tell him that the secret service of the Mandarin Hoang Fi Tu, underworld leader of Manila, was fully as good as that of the British; and when it came to gathering information among the underworld occupants of the Far East, much better than the British.

She said swiftly, stabbing each word at him as if it were a weapon.

"I mean, quite simply, Sir Mark, that I can and will do—for the sum of three thousand pounds—what your entire police and secret service have failed to do."

He chewed his lip. "Really, won't

you throw a little more light on the subject?"

"No," she replied curtly. "Either you accept my offer, or you don't."

Sir Mark's forehead wrinkled in an official frown.

"This is most extraordinary. Is that a—er—threat?"

It seemed impossible that a girl as superbly beautiful as this one should be sitting across the desk from him calmly blackmailing him, and through him, the British Empire!

Vivian Legrand laughed, that laugh that rippled low in her throat.

"Dare one threaten the British Secret Service?" she purred.

Sir Mark drummed upon the surface of the desk again. His thoughts at that moment were none too pleasant.

"Well, what are your terms?" came at length from him.

She was aware that she was mistress of the situation and she enjoyed the position.

"I wish, first of all, an invitation for myself and Mr. Adrian Wylie to the Official Ball to be held next Wednesday. I want you to have at that ball three thousand pounds in bank notes, and be prepared to pay them to me that night upon delivery of the letter. And lastly, I wish you to arrange with the municipal police of Shanghai that any charges against me in connection with the death of my father be dropped."

Sir Mark stared at her in amazement.

"You ask the impossible."

She made an impatient gesture.

"You are not dealing with a fool or a child, Sir Mark." I know that the municipal police in Shanghai, upon your request, will wipe out all record of any charge against me."

Their eyes met and there followed a quick duel. The man's smile was a signal of defeat.

"You are a very resourceful woman," he said.

"I have to be," she said. "You accept?"

"I accept," he said. "The charge will be quashed. You shall have your invitations tomorrow. And I shall be prepared to carry out my part of the bargain on the night of the ball. The cash will be ready."

She smiled her approval, gave him her hand and moved to the door; melted into the dusky hallway, leaving Sir Mark seated at his desk with a feeling of bafflement.

II

FOR six weeks Vivian Legrand and her companion in crime had been the guests of the Rajah of Salinger, following her rescue by the rajah from his own brother in the depths of the Malayan jungle. Vivian Legrand and Adrian Wylie had plotted with the Mandarin Hoang Fi Tu to topple the rajah from his throne. Yet when their plot failed Vivian and Wylie had made the rajah believe that they were motion picture people, making pictures in the jungle, Wylie being the director and Vivian Legrand the actress.

The rajah had offered the two of them his hospitality as recompense, in some part, for the injuries she had suffered at the hands of his brother, and Vivian Legrand, still thinking of a ruby mine which the rajah owned, had accepted.

When she returned from her meeting with Colonel Sir Mark Caywood she found Wylie waiting for her on the after deck of the rajah's yacht.

She dropped down into a chair beside him.

"Well," she said briefly, "we are to deliver the letter to him next Wednesday night in return for the payment of three thousand pounds—cash on the nail."

"Very nice," Wylie reflected, a touch of sarcasm in his manner. "Now all we have to do is the thing that the whole British Secret Service in the Far East has failed to do—discover who has the letter, get it away from them, and deliver it. Of course we'll find that quite simple."

Doc Wylie had not yet discovered what would be quite plain to him in later years of their partnership in crime—namely, that Vivian Legrand never took a step in one of their schemes without the next step being clear before her.

"I know who has it, and know how to get it," she assured him.

Wylie sat up, astonishment written on his face.

"You do?" he said incredulously. "I received the mandarin's cablegram only this morning. In less than twelve hours, in a strange port, you've discovered what the British Secret Service failed completely to find a trace of?"

Vivian Legrand bent closer and lowered her voice.

"I reasoned," she said, "that because Russia was involved the secret service would be looking for a Russian angle. And I reasoned that the man clever enough to steal that letter would also be clever enough to make sure that there was no visible thread connecting him with Russia—that it would be someone on whom the breath of suspicion would never fall.

"And I reasoned also that a document containing as much political dynamite as that letter would never be entrusted to a subordinate. It would be delivered by the principal himself to the Russian authorities—to make sure of getting the credit.

"The first thing I did was to check the steamship sailings. There has been no boat sailing from here for a Russian port, or a port where connections could be made for Russia, since June 14th. The first boat is next Saturday. I discovered that three persons had

DOC WYLIE

booked passage through to Harbin, where connections can be made on the Chinese Eastern Railroad for Siberia and St. Petersburg. Two of them were obviously impossible suspects. The third seemed impossible, and yet if my line of reasoning was correct, it had to be he. I went down into the Chinese quarter, managed to get hold of a discharged Chinese servant—and I was right."

"Who is it?" Wylie asked.

"Dr. Basil Orbison," Vivian Legrand responded.

Wylie thought a moment. "Never heard of him."

"HE is a doctor, half Greek, half English who is making an exhaustive study of tropical diseases," she told him. "He lives some seven miles out from the town. He is an exceedingly peculiar individual, yet well liked by the English. A friend of the Governor's, who is often called in by the hospitals here when something beyond their medical experience comes up. Not the slightest breath of suspicion that he might be connected with Russia, and yet his house is surrounded by a high wall and guarded like a fortress. And unless I'm a fool the letter we want is in that house."

Wylie looked at her seriously. "Where it's likely to stay if that house is as well guarded as you say."

"That's why I asked for—and got—invitations to the Official Ball on Wednesday night."

Then she made a swift gesture to Wylie as the tall form of the Rajah of Salingar loomed in the shadows of the deck. The rajah was their anchor to windward, their safeguard. As guests on his yacht they could go almost anywhere, move in circles that otherwise they could not enter. He must not be permitted to suspect, even for a moment, that they were not motion picture people. And then, too, there was the matter of the ruby mine that was a part of the royal properties of Salingar.

Educated at Oxford, the rajah's English was practically flawless, as he stopped beside them in the shadows and greeted his guests warmly. Vivian Legrand leaned back a trifle, so that the glow from a lantern at the companionway made highlights in the red of her hair and etched her exotic face in soft relief. Then she patted a cushion beside her and the rajah sank down upon it.

Wylie watched the absorbed face of the Malay ruler for a moment as the man talked with Vivian, and then with a grim smile of satisfaction got to his feet and went below to his cabin.

III

THE orchestra was playing a slow waltz when Vivian Legrand came up the steps of Government House on the arm of the Prince of Salingar, with Doc Wylie following discreetly behind.

A cap of cloth of silver hid her flaming hair, and a flame-like spray of egrets swayed above her head. Gown and hands and throat were shimmering with jewels—some of them given her by the rajah, others that he had loaned her. Pendants dangled beside cheeks that were pale as if all the blood had been drained out of them, but her lips were blood red.

The Governor and his wife greeted them courteously, and if their eyes widened a trifle at the sight of a white woman attending the Official Ball on the arm of a native rajah, it was not noticeable.

Vivian Legrand's greenish eyes, shadowed with lids as purple as grapes, flitted here and there about the long room. She was searching for someone, and presently she caught sight of the man she sought—Basil Orbison.

He was talking to a woman, and for the first time Vivian had a good look at him. His gaunt face was as pale as anything that lives in darkness. A bony, fleshless sort of face, plastered over with lifeless skin; ugly and interesting. The eyes glittered in bony

sockets. Dark hair flowed back from a high forehead.

The woman with him claimed Vivian Legrand's close attention, for she was the key to her plan. Without her, Vivian was helpless. By a coincidence that was no coincidence on Vivian's part the two women wore the same type of headdress—silver cap fitting over the hair, from which rose the flame-like spray of egrets. It had cost Vivian Legrand fifty dollars to find what kind of head dress the woman would wear, and to have the Chinese dressmaker make a duplicate of it for her.

Wylie, walking down the room beside her, was the only one who caught the whisper that came from her lips.

"That's the woman—talking to Orbison—you know what you've got to do—be ready when I get Orbison out on the veranda."

The next moment Vivian Legrand was smiling up into the eyes of the Rajah of Salingar.

With the rajah at her side she moved slowly about the room. Several times she stood close enough to the woman with Orbison, who was addressed as Madame Carpenter, to hear her voice. It was a low-pitched, well-modulated voice, and Vivian Legrand fixed its tones firmly in her mind.

Within an hour she had contrived to meet Dr. Basil Orbison and had steered him deftly to a corner of the veranda. His back was to the clustered shrubbery which bordered the veranda, and even if he had heard a faint rustling in the shrubbery he would have put it down to the passage of a night bird.

They stood there talking for a few minutes. There was not the slightest change in Vivian Legrand's manner or voice to indicate that she saw the stealthy shape that loomed up in the shrubbery behind the doctor. So cleverly did she hold his attention that he never knew what hit him.

His limp form slumped to the floor, and almost instantly Wylie had vaulted over the railing, still holding the blackjack.

"Get him over the railing, quick," Vivian Legrand said tensely.

Together they raised him and lowered him. While Vivian Legrand stood on the balcony above, Wylie swiftly went through the man's pockets and found the thing for which he was looking—a key ring.

"How long will he be out?" Vivian Legrand asked as he passed the keys up to her.

"Fifteen minutes—maybe twenty," Wylie said.

"It will have to do," she said tersely. She moved swiftly down the veranda and descended the steps to the garden. Wylie met her where the sanded path passed beneath the overhanging branches of a Yiang-ylang tree. She took a silken wrap that he carried and flung it over her dress. She turned up the collar, hiding her face from view.

Side by side they passed through the garden gate and approached the spot where Orbison's powerful car was parked. As they came opposite the spot where the chauffeur sat, Wylie paused and extended his hand.

"So sorry you're not feeling well, Madame Carpenter," he said with just the right touch of concern in his voice. "You're sure you don't want me to go with you?"

"Quite sure," Vivian Legrand answered, making her tones as like that of the woman who was Orbison's companion as she could. It was not the last time that her gift for mimicry

would stand her in good stead. "I shall be quite all right. I am so sorry to leave so early, but Dr. Orbison understands. Good night."

Then, before the chauffeur could get out of the car, she opened the door and slipped into the rear.

"Home," she said quietly. Then, as the big car slid smoothly from the curb she leaned back with a sigh of relief. So far her scheme had worked without a hitch. If only she had a little more luck she would win.

FROM Government House to Orbison's fortress-like home was seven miles, but the car did it in fifteen minutes. The chauffeur let his passenger out of the Rolls and inquired:

"Shall I wait for madame?"

Vivian Legrand gestured a negative, crossed the porch and rang the bell.

The butler opened the door, saw what he deemed to be the woman who had left the house with the doctor standing on the threshold, and flung the door open.

Quite unsuspiciously he closed the door behind him, shot the bolt—found a revolver jammed into his ribs.

"Don't move. And don't speak," Vivian Legrand whispered.

The butler stood with his fingers jammed against the wall, utterly unable to comprehend the turn of events. His face went pale, not so much from fear of the gun as fear of what his master might do when he found that entry had been effected so easily into a house that was guarded like a fortress.

"Now," whispered Vivian Legrand, "where are the other servants?"

"In their quarters," came the surly answer.

"Where does your master keep his safe?" she demanded.

"I don't know," he spat back at her.

"At three I shoot," Vivian Legrand said curtly. "One—two—"

"Upstairs in his study," the man cut in hurriedly. "Take that gun further away. I don't like it so damn close."

"Lead me to the study. And don't try any funny stuff. I'll shoot first and ask questions afterwards. And don't figure that because I'm a woman I won't shoot. I will."

The man started forward, then stopped abruptly. From the rear of the house the sound of voices and the blare of a phonograph had come suddenly as a door was opened. The servants were making merry in their master's absence. Then the door was closed again and the noise cut off as abruptly as it had begun. There were tiny beads of perspiration on the butler's forehead.

"That was lucky for you," Vivian Legrand said grimly. "You'll be the first to get hurt. Go ahead."

Surrendering to the menace behind him, the butler moved forward across the red-tiled floor and slowly ascended the carpeted stairs. At the head of the stairs he indicated a door at the right of the hallway.

"That's the study," he said sullenly. "You won't be able to get in. He keeps it locked all the time."

Vivian Legrand's answer was to take the bunch of keys from her hand bag.

"Unlock the door," she said curtly to the butler. Under the muzzle of the menacing revolver the man tried the keys. The second fitted. The door swung open.

"Inside," she told him curtly. Once the man was inside she touched the light switch on the wall, and then closed the door with her foot. The butler turned and peered at her, again endeavoring to see her face. She checked him.

"No tricks, unless you want to commit suicide," she warned him curtly. "Here!" She touched a big chair with her foot. "Sit here."

Whipping a scarf from the table in the center of the room she effectively blindfolded the man. No sense in leaving a trail that could be followed, she felt—and that was to become one of the cardinal principles of the Legrand ring of blackmailers in later years, one of the things that baffled the police of three continents. There was rarely a trail that led to one of the gang.

Slowly her eyes went from object to object in the room, measuring, identifying. It was unlikely that Dr. Orbison would have a letter as important as was this one lying around loose. It was undoubtedly well hidden. She discarded the big writing desk with one cursory glance. That would be the first place that a searcher would look, and the doctor would realize that.

There was no safe in sight, but a large painting on the far side of the room caught her eye. It was out of harmony with the rest of the room. No reason for it to be there. And no reason either for it to be set into the wall, instead of hanging as a painting normally would.

A quick search and she found a spot on the wall beside it where the wall paper was smudged, as though fingers had been often pressed there. She pressed with her thumb. A click and the painting swung outward, disclosing the steel door of a safe behind it.

Again the key ring that she had taken from Orbison's pocket went into play and the steel door swung open.

There was nothing in it, however, except a small box with a few bills, a package of letters, and a thin rod of steel with a cross piece at one end. A hasty inspection showed that the letter she sought was not among the bundle lying in the safe.

Glancing at the butler, who was sitting taut in his chair, listening to every movement, Vivian Legrand picked up the T-shaped rod of steel and inserted it in a round opening in the back of the safe. There was a faint click and the door of a hidden compartment swung outward. Lying in the compartment was a long envelope. She opened it swiftly. It held the letter for which she was in search.

IV

VIVIAN LEGRAND knew enough of the political background of the Far East to grasp at the first reading the tremendous import of that document. She knew the importance to England of the Khyber Pass, the only practicable route from the north into India, the route through which every invader of India from the time of Alexander the Great has come, the pass through the mountains that has been so heavily fortified by England that it would be impossible for an invading army to force it.

And here was a letter to the British Secret Service from a Russian agent offering to barter to the English knowledge of a hitherto unknown pass through the mountains for his freedom.

The writer went on to say that he had discovered this pass, and had been mixed up with a riot in the Calcutta bazaars, arrested and sentenced to life in the Andaman Islands before he could report his discovery to his superiors in St. Petersburg.

Vivian Legrand's greenish eyes narrowed thoughtfully as the full import of the thing flashed over her. No wonder Sir Mark Caywood had been willing to pay three thousand pounds for the return of this letter. Knowledge

of this unguarded pass into India from the north, in the hands of Russia, was a constant threat to the security of the British rule in India. And Russia? What would the knowledge be worth to her? Not a single implication of the potential possibilities that the situation held was escaping Vivian Legrand's mind.

So engrossed was she in the contents of the letter that she did not notice the butler's right hand groping for the cord of a bell pull that hung quite near. When she looked up from the letter the man's arms were again resting on the arms of the chair.

She was in the act of folding the letter when the room door flung open, and four of Orbison's men hurled themselves in. For a split second they stared in amazement at finding a woman in jewels and plumes in that place. Vivian Legrand's arm reached the alabaster globe above her head. She turned the lights out.

She was through the group like an eel as they sprang for her. She was down the stairs, across the hall, with the front door open, inserting the key in the outside, before the first of her pursuers reached the bottom of the staircase. And then she stopped short in consternation. Just walking up to the front door was Dr. Basil Orbison.

He looked at Vivian Legrand, and his thin mouth moved in a slow smile. He bowed in exaggerated courtesy.

"So, it is the lovely lady of the Official Ball who honors me with a visit—in my absence. So fortunate that I returned in time! I would have regretted missing you."

His eyes flickered from Vivian Legrand to the armed men who stood in the hallway behind her. Then he took her arm and urged her gently back into the house and into a room on the right. The butler followed them, a gun poised in readiness.

Vivian Legrand halted just inside the door. She stood beside one of a pair of tall vases of blue pottery, wide of neck and bellying out as they curved toward rounded bases. The vases stood on each side of the doorway.

Dr. Orbison dropped into a chair and peered up at her like an expectant vulture.

"I congratulate the British Secret Service. I really did not credit them with sufficient intelligence to trace this little affair to me."

Vivian Legrand did not move.

"She was looking for a paper of some sort," the butler burst out. "And she got it!"

"Your handbag," demanded Orbison.

Vivian Legrand extended the bag. He went through it rapidly, dropping the small revolver it contained on the table. Then he returned it to her and shot a string of sibilant words that Vivian Legrand took to be Russian to the butler. The latter went to the door and a moment later a Chinese woman appeared at the doorway.

"Chu-Chi will search you," Orbison announced. "I have called her, not from motives of delicacy, but because a woman is more likely to find a woman's hiding place than a man."

He watched in silence as the Chinese woman searched Vivian Legrand swiftly and expertly, overlooking no possible place where a letter could be hidden. She reported in Chinese that there was nothing hidden upon the red-headed woman.

ORBISON'S thin mouth curled up; the vulture's hairless head bobbed up and down as he waved the Chinese woman impatiently

out of the room. His long fingers curved slightly, as if, filled with desire, they tensed to leap at Vivian Legrand's throat. There was strength in those fingers, she knew—enormous strength. Meeting the cold eyes she knew that this man would murder her without a qualm. But she did not flinch from his gaze. Instead she smiled quite calmly. The letter was safe. He did not suspect where it was—would probably never find it unless she revealed its hiding place. And she knew that she held the trump card.

"Where is the letter you took from my safe," he demanded.

"I took no letter," Vivian Legrand answered steadily. "Your butler summoned help before I could find it."

Orbison laughed, a sudden little laugh. Vivian Legrand realized where she had heard the counterpart of that laugh before—the same little laugh over sudden silence that may be heard just before the Chinese executioner raises his sword for the stroke that will sever his victim's head from his shoulders.

"I know that you lie," Orbison said. He stroked the curve of his mouth with his tongue's tip, very much as if tasting blood and liking it. "It would be wise to tell me now where it is. You will eventually."

"I didn't find it," Vivian told him. She put the right trace of impatience into her manner. "Can't you see that for yourself? Your men came while I was searching. I had to run for it. You caught me just as I was about to leave the house. Common sense should tell you that I am not lying."

As she talked a great satisfaction came into her heart. Orbison had made one fatal error. All she needed now was time and luck to win clear.

"I think we can refresh her memory," Orbison went on, speaking to the butler. He made Vivian Legrand a little bow. "You will excuse me a moment, I am sure."

Opening a door on the further side of the room he disappeared. Vivian Legrand could see that it was a room of gleaming white enamel, with strange instruments and tubes on white tables. Taking her eyes from the door she glided sidewise, crabwise, toward the table in the center of the room. Her movements were almost imperceptible. Her eyes flickered for a second over the safety catch of the butler's gun. It was still locked. Did the man know it? Upon the answer to that question hung life or death.

Then Orbison entered the room again, carrying in one hand a small test tube and in the other a hypodermic syringe.

"You really are an utter fool," Vivian Legrand told the doctor.

"So?" he mummured softly. He filled the hypodermic. "And what leads you to that conclusion?"

"Because," Vivian Legrand said with superb indifference. "You haven't the ability to distinguish the truth from a lie. I came here to get that letter—yes. But I had no connection with the British Secret Service. My scheme was to steal the letter to show you that I was a better woman to have as an ally than an enemy—and once I had blackmailed you into obtaining me a post in the Russian Secret Serivce, to return the letter to you."

The doctor laid the hypodermic down carefully; took out a cigarette. His case fell to the floor. Vivian Legrand took a step, picked it up and returned it. Orbison was clever. But even he saw nothing in the movement that brought her a step closer to the table.

"A man of real cleverness would be able to see the advantage of having me as an ally," she went on. "Also, he would realize that I wouldn't come here without c e r t a i n—er—precautions. There will be inquiries if I do not return."

"There will be no inquiries," the doctor returned indifferently.

Again Vivian Legrand took a sidewise step. Again her eyes flickered to the safety catch. It was still down.

The doctor picked up the hypodermic. "Now we will make the injection," he murmured. "It would really be useless to resist."

Vivian Legrand did not reply. She was within reaching distance of the library table now—and on the table lay her own gun, dropped there by Orbison when he searched her bag.

She made a careless step toward the table—and whirled, gun in hand, facing the two men. The butler pulled the trigger of his gun. There was no explosion.

"Hands up! snapped Vivian. Orbison's head turned like that of a startled vulture at the crisp command. "Drop that gun, you!"

V

THE two men stood as if frozen. Then the butler's gun dropped to the floor, and his hands followed Orbison's above his head. Now it was that Vivian Legrand's greenish eyes bit into the vulture features of Orbison. She moved backwards toward the door to the hall. So engrossed was she by the men's upraised hands, and the gun on the floor, that she failed to see the sudden grimness that darkened the face of the doctor.

She felt the high heels of her evening slippers touch the door sill. Her free hand reached out and down into one of the blue vases, where she had dropped the letter. Then, with the precious document in her hand, she reached for the door knob.

Without warning the doctor's upraised hands darted for a weapon.

Vivian Legrand whipped about with the swiftness of a striking serpent. With a half turn of her body, she shot. Orbison dropped, face down.

Through narrow green eyes she glared at the butler. He glanced once at his dead master. Then his hands reached higher, trembling.

Vivian Legrand opened the front door. A moment later the roar of an automobile told that she was escaping in safety.

TWO hours later Vivian entered the salon of the rajah's yacht and dropped a package of Bank of England notes in front of Wylie.

"Three thousand pounds," she said curtly. "It was worth five."

"You delivered the letter?" Wylie asked.

"I delivered the letter," she said. "But I read it first. And we must sail in an hour."

Wylie sat up alertly. "What's up? Danger?"

She shook her head.

"No. Money. There is a prisoner on the Andaman Islands worth a fortune to whoever reaches him first. And if we can outsail and outwit the Russian and the British secret services, we'll have something they'll pawn their souls to ransom."

"But the ruby mine," Wylie protested.

"That can wait," Vivian Legrand said firmly. "When we have no further use for the rajah as a blind—then will come the time for securing his ruby mine."

The LADY from HELL

Behind a Half-Opened Door Vivian Legrand Sways in a Siren's Dance and Tricks Forty Pirates Out of Liberty and Life

A True Story

By Eugene Thomas

"I'll kill the first man!"

The Episode of the Forty Murderers

VIVIAN LEGRAND was fully aware of the sinister reputation of the man whose shop she was entering. He had the reputation of having in stock many things difficult to purchase anywhere else. Such things as a knife and a hand to wield it on a dark street.

She knew that he would have at his finger tips a most intimate knowledge of life in Port Blair, capital of India's Penal Colony in the Andaman Islands. And what he did not know, he would find out for you.

The latter was Vivian's reason for seeking out Wing Li, the Chinese bird-

seller on Port Blair's principal street. She was in Port Blair to kidnap one Ivan Stavinsky from under the noses of his British jailers. Stavinsky, a Russian secret service agent, had been sentenced to a life term in the Andamans for a civil crime committed in Calcutta.

A Chinese sitting cross-legged on a cushion in the rear of the shop rose at her entrance and came forward.

"You wanchee buy?" he inquired in pidgin, the common tongue of the Islands.

Vivian Legrand shook her head and answered in fluent Cantonese.

"I desire to buy," she said, "but I am afraid that you have not the object I wish to purchase."

She seated herself on a stool beside the counter and looked up at him quietly. Her eyes, heavy lidded, and of a greenish color, were baffling. Flaming red hair clouded her face.

"I have many things," the Chinese told her.

"I am seeking a bird. But only one kind will do. And I can pay only one price. Three pounds, sixpence."

Their eyes met and they exchanged one long, calculating glance.

"Is it a native bird?" inquired the Chinese.

"It is a Chinese bird," Vivian Legrand responded. "But now it roosts in Manila."

A swift smile broke the impassive yellow mask. "I am he whom you seek," he said. "What are the instructions of the Mandarin Hoang Fi Tu?"

RED-HEADED Vivian Legrand was a breath-taking siren who blackmailed the rich and powerful. She had no scruples. She knew no fear. She began her career of crime by inspiring the murder of her own father in a gambling hell on Bubbling Well Road, Shanghai.

She won immunity for this deed by recovering a letter which contained a clew to an important state secret, something the British secret service had been unable to accomplish. But Vivian Legrand read the letter before she sold it to the British and now is racing to reach the convict who wrote the letter, in order to kidnap him from a penal colony and sell his secret again before the British can lay hands on him.

THE Chinese shopkeeper was one of the agents of the sinister mandarin, whose long-nailed fingers reached through the underworld of the whole Far East. The formula Vivian Legrand had used, simple as it was, had identified her as an agent of the mandarin.

"Do you know a prisoner whose name is Ivan Stavinsky?" she asked.

The Chinese reflected a moment, then nodded.

"Can you get a message to him?"

"It will not be difficult. Just now he is a gardener on the grounds of the Chief Commissioner's house."

"I want you," Vivian Legrand said, "to get word to him that he is to be rescued and placed aboard the yacht, Southern Cross, in the harbor. You will know the best hour and the best place for the rescue to be made, and you will have a boat waiting for me somewhere on the water front. It will be impossible for me to use the yacht's launch."

The Chinese raised protesting hands.

"It cannot be done," he expostulated. "There would be no way of getting him aboard the yacht during the day without being seen. And because he is not a ticket-of-leave man, at night he is locked up.

"But even if he were free at night, it could not be done. The water front is well patrolled, and the Indian police are constantly on the alert about the harbor. Besides, this Stavinsky is a dangerous man. He has the instinct of the killer . . . the instinct of the tiger. He would have no gratitude toward you for rescuing him. He would not hesitate to kill you if it would serve his purpose."

Vivian Legrand looked at him with the unreadable, faintly-slant-eyed gaze that, had he known her better, would have told him that trouble was brewing. Her voice was suddenly harsh.

"That is my business. It will be yours to give me the information I want and to carry out my orders."

The Chinese quailed.

"I but meant to be helpful," he murmured.

"I want information, not advice," she said curtly. "When is the best time to free this prisoner?"

The man hesitated. "He is always guarded."

"Police or soldier?" Vivian Legrand queried.

"Neither," the man responded. "A ticket-of-leave man. And him you could not bribe. He knows that for Stavinsky to escape while in his charge would mean life imprisonment without privileges for him."

"A blow on the head?" Vivian Legrand suggested.

The Chinese shook his head. Stavinsky could not pass through the streets, and even if he were to reach the water front he could never leave the dock. No, he must be smuggled aboard. And the Chinese didn't know how.

"I do," Vivian Legrand said suddenly. "I think I see a way to make the prison authorities place him aboard the yacht themselves."

She talked rapidly for a few minutes. The Chinese listened, while a look of admiration spread over his face. And in the end he agreed that, if luck was with her, she might be able to work it. Then he said humbly:

"Is it permitted that this unworthy one advise you that the boats in the harbor, even the yacht of the Rajah of Salingar on which you are a guest, will be searched at once? And if you leave before the search is made, they will send a boat with soldiers after you to search the ship."

"They can search to their heart's content," Vivian Legrand told him. "They will never find him, where he will be hidden. You may tell him that; also that I have already received permission from the High Commissioner to visit a village of the Andamese, the one called Karawas, which is about twenty miles down the coast.

"Immediately after the escape of the prisoner is discovered and the ship searched, we will sail for Karawas, re-

main there one night as a blind, return to Port Blair to pay our respects to the High Commissioner, and then sail again."

Vivian Legrand left the shop of the bird-seller.

Meanwhile, from Calcutta a British gunboat was steaming for Port Blair, her fires roaring under forced draft. There was occasion for hurry. Her commander had been placed under the orders of Colonel Sir Mark Caywood, Chief of the British secret service in the Far East, and Sir Mark had informed him curtly that neither coal nor men were to be spared in reaching the Penal Colony. The sailor was not informed that a certain prisoner there had discovered a hidden pass through the mountains that guard the northern frontier of India. The secret was of immense value to Great Britain—and to Russia.

From Penang a Dutch cargo boat . . . Dutch at least in registry . . . was lumbering southward. She was Russian in crew. Her captain was a commander in the Imperial Russian Navy, although few persons outside of the secret service headquarters in St. Petersburg were aware of that fact. Haste was a part of her program also.

The cablegram in code that her captain had received in Saigon, ostensibly relating to a cargo of jute to be picked up in Bombay, had in reality been orders for him to proceed to the Andaman Islands with all possible speed.

The object of the gunboat, the cargo boat and Vivian Legrand, was the same.

II

THE office of the doctor who administers to the convicts of Port Blair stands on a slight hill from which can be seen the dusty streets of the little town, the blue water of the bay, and the boats at anchor there.

It was just after the siesta hour that Vivian Legrand rang the doctor's door bell.

The man who admitted her was an orderly. He conducted her into an empty hall and disappeared. In a moment or two he returned, and opening a door on the right, ushered her into a reception room.

The man who rose from behind the desk in the center of the room was tall and broad enough to give the impression of being unusually powerful. There was about him a terrible vitality that battered against the will of the observer. This impression may have been due, in some measure, to the eyes. They were dark, with a peculiar reddish glow like very dark garnets.

Vivian Legrand looked into them as she approached, and saw that their owner had the power to turn off almost at will their curious red gleam, almost as though a camera shutter had clicked shut over them.

"Please be seated, Miss"—he glanced at the card he still held in his hand—"Mrs. Legrand. I am Doctor Ferguson."

"I want to consult you professionally," Vivian Legrand explained.

"I see." The doctor was noncommittal. "You realize, of course, that I am the prison doctor, and that my practice is confined, ordinarily, to convicts?"

"Quite," Vivian Legrand said pleasantly. "But unfortunately we have no doctor on the Rajah of Salingar's yacht, on which I am a guest, and from what I have heard of the half-caste doctor who administers to the civilians in Port Blair, I do not think that I care to place the case in his hands. And on the other hand I would

have no hesitation in leaving it in yours."

"You are most kind." The red flared again, and then the eyes played their camera-shutter trick. "Perhaps you did not realize that I am not supposed to handle outside cases."

"Without special permission," Vivian Legrand amended with her most charming smile. "I have here a note of introduction from the High Commissioner." She extended it. "I realize that you are a busy man. I merely wish a diagnosis and an outline of treatment."

"I see. Just what is your trouble, Mrs. Legrand?"

"Oh, it isn't for myself." Vivian Legrand laughed as if the idea of her needing treatment from a doctor were quite amusing. "But for someone for whom I am in a measure responsible."

"And his trouble?"

"A belief that he is being robbed . . . a temporary belief, of course . . . but one that is becoming increasingly frequent. To explain, he has had this trouble for some time, and I brought him along with us on the yachting trip in the belief that the voyage might aid the condition. But of late it has seemed to increase. A day or two ago he insisted that I had deprived him of a favorite pair of shoes. He would become angry when I insisted that I knew nothing of them. Then, in a day or so, the matter would be completely forgotten."

"Quite a common paranoia, Mrs. Legrand. There is nothing so unusual in that."

"Perhaps not," Vivian Legrand agreed. "But these attacks or whatever they may be are becoming increasingly frequent. Only last night he insisted that I had robbed him of a large sum of money. When, as a matter of fact, he has no money, and is completely dependent upon me. I was only able to quiet him by telling him that the money would be restored today. On that condition he agreed to meet me here."

"Here?" the thin tone had a note of disapproval.

"Yes. You see, I was quite anxious to have you examine him during one of these attacks."

"There was really no occasion to bring him here," the doctor said. "It would have been quite all right for me to visit him upon the yacht."

"But he wouldn't have seen you, if he had known you were a doctor. It was necessary to trick him into coming here. All that I ask is that you examine him, give me your opinion on whether this condition is likely to increase, and what treatment is best."

"Very well," the doctor said. "When do you expect him?"

"At any moment now," Vivian Legrand answered, glancing at her watch. "I imagine that you are a busy man. If you have work to do, just leave me here in your reception room, and when your patient arrives, the orderly can call you."

She held her breath. On the doctor's reaction to this suggestion hung the success or failure of her plan. If he reacted as she figured that he would, and luck was with her, she would have in her hands the man who held the key to the secret for which two nations would be willing to pay—and pay well.

The doctor nodded. "I am quite busy," he said. "You will find magazines and books there on the table."

WAITING until the door to the ward had closed behind him, Vivian Legrand made a swift examination of the room. There were

two doors, one leading to the hall, the other to the hospital proper. Windows were on only one side, facing the roadway. A large settee was in one corner, a heavy, clumsy article of furniture. She opened the door to the hall a trifle and peered out. No one there.

Picking up a three months' old magazine she crossed to one of the windows, drew aside the curtains a trifle, and leaned against the casement. To a casual observer she would have seemed merely engaged in turning the pages of a magazine in a rather bored manner.

She did not have long to wait. Scarcely ten minutes later she saw two men on foot turn in at the gate beside the road. From the description she knew that one of them was Stavinsky. The other man must be his guard. Instantly she was alert. Crossing swiftly to the door leading to the hospital, she listened. There was no sound there. Then she ran soundlessly into the hall.

Before Stavinsky's guard had time to ring, the door was opened and Vivian Legrand stood on the threshold. Her hat and handbag lay behind a row of books on the table. There was no indication that she was not an occupant of the doctor's quarters.

"The doctor is expecting you," she said quietly. "He is performing an important operation just now, and left word that the two of you were to wait in here."

She indicated the open door of the reception room. The two preceded her into the room. She entered after them and carefully closed the door behind her.

The guard dropped on to the settee, his rifle held between his knees. Stavinsky dropped into a chair near the table. For a few seconds there was silence.

Stavinsky was wide-shouldered, and the chest at his open shirt front was a mat of curly hair. His head was cropped, and his face was one to remember — big-nosed, square-jawed, with piercing black eyes. Just at the moment there was a look in those eyes of a caged animal who sees the door of his cage slowly opening, and wonders if he can make the dash to liberty before it closes again.

Vivian Legrand picked up her handbag and strolled casually toward the door. She turned, just as she reached the settee, opened her bag, took out a little mirror and inspected her face. The guard glanced at her indifferently, and then his gaze shifted.

He never knew what hit him. The blackjack that Vivian Legrand had in her handbag struck him savagely across the head. He went out like a light.

With a leap like an agile cat Stavinsky caught the rifle before it clattered to the floor.

"Put him behind the settee," Vivian Legrand ordered tensely. If the orderly or the doctor came in just then they were lost. "Put his rifle back there, too."

Together they dropped the unconscious man behind the clumsy article of furniture so that he was completely hidden from sight. Then from beneath her dress Vivian Legrand whipped a white shirt and a pair of flannel trousers.

"Get these on in a hurry," she ordered tensely. "Throw your prison clothes behind there with the guard. You know what you've got to do?"

"Wing Li told me," the other responded in a swift whisper. Already he was ripping off his clothes. "I pretended to be sick . . . a touch of the sun . . . so the guard got permission to bring me up to the hospital."

"Keep your feet out of sight," she ordered. "You're still wearing prison

shoes, remember. I couldn't bring you shoes. Didn't know your size, even if it had been possible."

She crossed the room and tapped upon the door leading to the hospital. A moment later the doctor appeared.

"He's here," she said in a low voice. "And worse than ever. I can't do anything with him."

"I'll talk to him," the doctor said and walked into the room.

STAVINSKY was standing at the far side of the table, leaning on it. He glared at the doctor as he approached and said in a loud voice:

"I want my money."

"Of course, of course," Dr. Ferguson said soothingly. "I'll see that you get your money. But first I want to talk to you."

"I don't want to talk," Stavinsky said furiously. "I want my money. I want my money, and if I don't get it I'll break your neck." He turned toward Vivian Legrand. "You told me if I'd come up here I'd get my money, and I want it."

He picked up a heavy book-end on the table and poised it, as if to throw.

"I want my money."

Attracted by the loud tones an orderly appeared in the doorway behind them. The doctor said something to him rapidly and then turned toward Vivian Legrand.

"Impossible to do anything with him in this condition."

"But I can't leave him like this," Vivian Legrand said hopelessly. "Can't you do something to quiet him?"

"I'm going to give him a hypodermic," the doctor said.

The assistant appeared in the door behind him, and handed the doctor a filled hypodermic, then slowly moved to a position behind Stavinsky, who still stood behind the table demanding his money.

With a swift gesture the orderly threw his arms about Stavinsky's shoulders and tightened them so that the man gasped for breath. The doctor rolled up the shirt sleeve and pressed the hypodermic home.

"There," he said, stepping back, "he'll be all right now." Then he said to the orderly, "Just hold him for a few minutes."

"I'm so sorry," Vivian Legrand said. "I wouldn't have subjected you to this annoyance for the world. The poor fellow has been getting worse for days, but I had no idea when he left me this morning, that he would be like this."

"It frequently happens," the doctor remarked.

Even as he spoke Stavinsky's struggles became less violent.

"It's a sad case," Vivian Legrand said. "I'm very much afraid that he will have to be sent to an asylum." Then she hesitated. "I hate to ask you, but is there any way you can assist me in getting him back to the ship?"

"Of course," the doctor said. "We'll send him down in the hospital ambulance."

He turned to the orderly.

"Have this man placed in the ambulance and taken aboard Mrs. Legrand's yacht," he said.

And fifteen minutes later, with Vivian Legrand in attendance, Stavinsky was placed aboard the yacht by men whose duty it was to prevent his escape.

III

FIVE hours later the last soldier had departed over the side of the trim white yacht. Every possible hiding place on the ship had been

searched. The coal bunkers had been probed with iron bars, the water tanks opened and examined. But of the missing Stavinsky they had found no trace. He was safely hidden in the opening between the cabin wall and the hull of the ship that Wylie had had made beneath his bunk.

It was a cramped space for a large man, to be sure, and gave him room to only lie flat, like a man in a coffin. But it represented safety and Stavinsky had not demurred.

Within a few minutes after the soldiers had left, the anchor came clanking aboard and the ship's nose was turned toward the point of land around which lay the native village, off which they were to spend the night.

Vivian Legrand breathed a sigh of relief as the roofs of Port Blair fell astern. The one thing that she had feared had been questions concerning the man who had been brought aboard from the hospital. But there had been no visitors from ashore to ask embarrassing questions, and as the rajah had been ashore himself he knew nothing of it. The following afternoon they would return to Port Blair, pay a formal visit of farewell to the High Commissioner—and then Rangoon and the sale of Stavinsky's secret to the highest bidder.

Vivian Legrand always slept like a cat. The normal sounds of her surroundings did not penetrate her slumber, but let any alien sound intrude itself and she was awake. That night she slept even more lightly than usual.

She did not know what had awakened her, later that night, while the yacht lay off the native village, but she suddenly found herself sitting up in her berth listening intently. She reached out for the revolver which she never failed to place beside her bed. With a little tingling shock her fingers encountered only emptiness where the revolver had been.

Hastily throwing a robe over her nightdress, she flung open the door and stepped into the dining saloon into which her room opened. There she stumbled over a pair of shoes. A slight sound caused her to look up. She saw

DOC WYLIE

a pair of stockinged feet disappearing up the stairs that led to the deck.

She gazed after the disappearing feet in perplexity. If they belonged to Adrian Wylie, what did he intend to do? She wanted to call to him. She did call in a low voice. But there was no answer.

She stood there a moment undecided, listening, watching. Then a hoarse shout broke the silence. Wylie's voice. There was a note of surprise in it, and it was followed by another that was unmistakably one of warning. Other shouts came, and sounds of heavy feet.

She was no longer uncertain as to what was happening. Curses, shouting,

running feet. Clubs striking steel plates—they could only mean a battle, and instinctively she knew that Wylie was attacked.

On the wall at the far end of the dining saloon hung a collection of native weapons—knives, blowguns, bows and arrows. Hastily snatching a slim-bladed kris from the collection she ran up the stairs to the deck.

She was just in time to see a dark figure leap over the rail and run toward the forward deck whence came the sound of battle. She ran to the rail. Below her, down there under the ship's rail, was a rowboat. The faces of half a dozen of them were looking upward in the starlight. Scarcely a dozen feet away another boat, laden with men, was approaching the ship.

Her first thought had been that her plot had been discovered, that soldiers from ashore were boarding the vessel. But a glance told her that these men were not soldiers. And then she knew the truth. These men were escaped convicts seeking to capture the yacht.

At her feet lay a heavy piece of iron. She stooped over and lifted it. With the down roll of the ship. Below was the black shape of the rowboat. She hurled the iron straight down. It went through the shell of the little boat with a rending smash of planking. A swift slash of her knife and the knotted rope up which the man had climbed, dropped into the water. Then she turned and raced toward the forward deck. Harsh voices leaped out to meet her, mingled with the screams and wild cries of the men in the sunken boat.

Forward the rajah, the captain and officers of the ship were already lined up against the further rail. Adrian Wylie was retreating slowly down the center of the deck before the clubs of three men.

Wylie was hard pressed, and as he backed against the open portion of the deck, one man slipped past for a rear attack.

VIVIAN LEGRAND screamed, but too late. The club crashed across Wylie's head and he went down. The three men turned their attention to her. She backed against the rail.

"I'll kill the first man to touch me," she said in a low voice.

But the three men armed with clubs, deploying from the prone figure on the deck, were moving swiftly to the left and right and center. But this remarkable woman was not afraid, even though there seemed no chance for escape. In another moment a club might come crashing across her skull, as it had crashed across Wylie's—but that thought never entered her head.

In later years, when peril loomed in one of the schemes in which Wylie and Vivian Legrand were engaged, the former often wondered whether she were the bravest woman in the world, or merely a fool who did not know the meaning of danger. He says he never found out.

She seemed to explode in flaming movement.

The slimmer of the three men, whose name was Morgan, fell back before the sweep of her knife. She whirled in mid-air and launched herself at Stavinsky. He was caught unawares, too slow in his movements. The blade ripped down the length of his right forearm.

The others retreated hastily before that whirlwind of fury, but almost beside her a dripping figure arose—one of the men from the sunken boat. His arm shot out and wrenched hers viciously. The knife clattered to the floor.

"The little hellcat!" Stavinsky snarled. "Tap her on the head. Lock her up. Anything, so that you can take care of this arm."

Blood was spurting from the wound. He was trying to stop it with the other hand.

"I wish it had been your heart," Vivian Legrand said with deliberate venom.

The convicts were undisputed masters of the ship. Even in the short space of time since she had been disarmed the rope had again been fastened to the railing and men were swarming up. The deck was alive with them. Having the ship, what were they going to do with it? And, more specifically, what were they going to do with the passengers, with her, with Wylie, lying there on the deck, with the rajah? In addition to escaping prison, they had committed piracy. Facing death for that, they were not likely to stop at anything further. The punishment for additional crime could be no worse.

As if to place a period to her thoughts, Vivian Legrand heard Stavinsky speak, as he lifted the arm of a lascar sailor, the man who had been on watch, and let it drop to the deck with a sodden thump.

"Getting stiff already," he grunted. "Throw him overboard. He's no good to anybody any more."

Three men sprang to obey his orders. Without expression on their faces they lifted the body and carried it to the rail.

IV

GRAY dawn had already crept into the sky as Vivian Legrand watched the body slide over the side. Her mind was working desperately. Even in times of greatest peril, she never lost an opportunity to take a trick—never passed up an opportunity, however small, to turn a seemingly hopeless situation to her own advantage. But she could see no loophole here.

Then, as the body disappeared beneath the water, Stavinsky turned to the little group of prisoners.

"We're masters of the ship," he began abruptly. "Unfortunately, none of us know how to navigate." He thrust his face out toward the captain. "That's where you come in. Navigate the ship to the point I indicate, and you won't be harmed. Try any tricks and you'll feed the fishes."

The captain, a lean-faced, bronzed Scotchman, swore deeply.

"I'll see you in hell first," he said roundly.

Stavinsky moved so swiftly that the deed was done almost before the words were out of the captain's mouth. The knife went into the captain's throat as though the flesh were soft butter. A dark knife handle jutted out from the captain's throat. The blade was buried deeply in the flesh.

For a split second the captain stood as though carved from stone. He raised groping hands to his throat. Gurgled chokingly, and slumped to the deck, a bright stream of crimson trickling from beneath his chin.

All that had happened in a brace of seconds. There had been no other sound. Almost before Vivian Legrand realized what had happened, Stavinsky had whirled and was facing the mate of the yacht.

"Are *you* willing to navigate us wherever I say?" he asked silkily, his hands slipping slowly toward the belt where a second knife rested.

The man raised eyes that were sick pools of horror and stared at Stavinsky. Words refused to come from his choken throat, but he nodded assent.

"You are a wise man," Stavinsky said evenly. "Don't make the mistake of thinking we are not serious. We are." He glanced around at the little knot of engineers and deck officers. "Any objections to getting the ship under way?"

There was no answer. Stavinsky spoke again.

"Very well. Get steam up and get the ship out to sea as fast as you can. When we're out of sight of land I'll give you our destination. Now get this: the crew will not be permitted on deck, except such men as are needed for the running of the ship, and then only under guard. The officers will be locked in their cabins except when they are actually on duty. Engineers will remain below decks at all times. All right, boys, take 'em below."

"What will we do with this one?" queried one of the men, indicating Wylie.

"Throw him in his cabin and lock the door. If he lives, all right. If he doesn't, that's just his hard luck."

Vivian Legrand watched without a word as the escaped convicts herded the rajah and the officers below, two of them bearing Wylie. Meanwhile, Morgan walked across to Stavinsky.

In the early sunlight she had her first good look at Morgan and she studied him with calculating eyes. He was smaller than Stavinsky, wiry of build, with a lean face under a soft, silky beard, thin nostrils, and thin lips.

His speech was quick, jerky; his movement nervous. And it was evident from his manner, from his speech, that while Stavinsky might be the guiding spirit in this affair, that here was a man who would not be content to accept orders placidly.

"That was useless, Ivan," he said curtly, indicating the body of the slain captain. "No sense in killing unless you have to."

"I'm the best judge of that," Stavinsky said angrily. "I engineered *your* escape, as well as that of the others, and I'm handling this affair."

Morgan flushed resentfully.

"The captain could have been shown that it was better to navigate the ship, rather than die," he said. "He would have given in. You gave him no chance."

Stavinsky glared at him.

"I told you," he said between tight lips, "that I'm running this affair. You're forgetting that, aren't you? And I'll run it the way that seems best to me. If you're getting chicken-hearted at the sight of a little blood, then you'd better jump overboard and swim back to prison."

Morgan did not answer, but Vivian Legrand could see the effort he was making to keep his temper. Stavinsky went on.

"All right, if you've come to your senses, we'll straighten things out. One of us must be on guard on the bridge all the time. We should have steam up and be ready to sail by eight o'clock. I'll stand guard on the bridge for six hours, and then you can relieve me."

Then for the first time Stavinsky noticed that Vivian Legrand was still on deck.

"What are you doing here, you hell-cat?" he demanded. "I thought you went below with the others."

"Why, you don't intend to lock *me* in my cabin, do you?" she queried innocently. "You're not afraid of me, are you?"

STAVINSKY exploded in a bellow of laughter. "I ought to wring your neck for what you did to me," he said, indicating the blood-

stained strip from his shirt about the arm. "But I won't. It's too pretty. I won't lock you in your cabin after we get out of sight of land. But until then you'll be locked in. And just to make sure, I'll lock you in myself."

Taking her arm he led her below.

"If you're wise you'll stay out of sight as much as possible," he told her. "There are forty men on this ship—escaped prisoners—murderers—all sentenced to the Andaman Islands for life. This is their chance at a getaway and if you think they'll let a little thing like a woman stand in their way, you don't know them."

They halted at the door of her cabin.

"We'll be neighbors," he said with a grin. "The captain won't need his cabin any more, so I'll just move in there, since I'm the captain now."

Vivian Legrand's eyes flickered the merest trifle. The captain's cabin was two doors past hers down the corridor. To get to the deck, Stavinsky would have to pass her cabin. In that moment was born a plan, desperate, harebrained, and presenting the only opportunity of escape she had seen.

All that day she deliberately kept away from Stavinsky. Now and then she permitted him a brief glimpse of her, cool and distant in her white clothes, as she sat in a chair on the after deck. When Stavinsky was off duty, she was locked in her cabin. Until night. Then she waited in her chair until he was beside her, then rose.

"Oh, I didn't see you," she lied.

"I suppose if you had, you'd be gone," he said grimly. "You needn't be afraid. I won't eat you."

She hesitated prettily, consummate actress that she was, before speaking.

"I wasn't sure how you'd feel about that," she said, and indicated his bandaged arm.

Stavinsky exploded in a bellow of laughter—and over her shoulder Vivian Legrand saw Morgan peering down at them from the bridge.

"That pin-prick," he said. "That's nothing."

"I'm glad," Vivian Legrand said softly, "that it wasn't worse. But you couldn't expect me to do anything . . . then."

The next morning she was up early. A trip to the cook furnished her with several bottles of ammonia, which she was going to need. Then she found the frightened Malay cabin boy. To him she gave a folded slip of paper, with instructions that it be delivered at once.

Then she waited until she heard one of the convicts call Stavinsky to go on watch on the bridge. Waited until she heard the sound of his door opening.

Then Vivian Legrand, a Delilah with flaming red hair, began spinning her web.

She stood before the long glass in her cabin. In it she could see the entire length of her body, in her long, straight cobweb-thin gown; a tube of sheerest black. The weblike embroidery over her breasts rose and fell with her breathing.

A queer, cold expression had settled upon her face. Only her eyes were warm. She smiled, a rather terrible smile, as she stood there, every nerve keyed.

There was a sound of a footstep outside. She had purposely left the door ajar—a crack of only an inch or two, but one that it would be almost impossible for a person passing in the corridor to miss seeing.

The footstep halted. Vivian Legrand began to hum a slow, lazy waltz, in her deep contralto. There was a faint creak and she saw the crack in the door open a trifle.

She lifted her bare arms above her head as high as she could, stretching. She locked her pointed fingers. With a slow, stroking movement she slid her hands down, tightening the silk about her body until her hands pressed taut above her hips. As the hands moved downward she breathed slowly, lifting and arching her bosom. She stared at herself—and at the effect the scene was having on the man at the crack in the doorway—peering intently into the mirror, her eyes watching the rise of her high, pointed breasts.

Then she whirled, her arms crossed protectively across her body, her eyes fixed in cleverly simulated fright on the door.

"Who is there?" she called, and no man living could have told that the note of fear in her voice was not genuine.

Years later a famous French theatrical producer who knew Vivian Legrand, to his own sorrow, said that if she had not taken up blackmail as a profession, she could have been the greatest actress the world had ever known.

V

THE door opened a little more. Framed in the aperture was the stark and sinister figure of Ivan Stavinsky.

"I thought I heard you call," he said by way of explanation. His eyes fluttered greedily over her silk-clad body.

"No, I didn't call." Her embarrassment was a work of art. Yet she was playing the most terrific gamble in her career. She was banking, betting, coldly and unrufflledly on an unpredictable factor—a man's emotions.

Moving to her berth, she threw a mandarin coat over her sheer gown. She shot a glance at the clock. It was nearly eight. "But I am glad you . . . you thought you heard me call. I *am* afraid."

He came further into the room. "You need not be afraid. No one will hurt you."

"Perhaps *you* won't." She dropped her long lashes over her greenish eyes, and then looked up at him again. This man was no fool. He knew the value of the secret of which he was the possessor, and her instinct had already warned her that he was not the type of man from whom a woman could worm a secret easily. "But you aren't the only one on board. There are forty and if *you* were gone—"

She stopped, letting the sentence die away, leaving the unspoken implication hanging in the air between them.

He crossed the room with swift strides, his easily aroused suspicions flaming; grasped her hands.

"What do you mean—if I were gone?" he demanded.

"Nothing," she protested in distress. "Nothing. I shouldn't have said it. I wouldn't have—but I was so afraid—and you were the only one I thought I could trust to protect me—and when I heard—"

Again she stopped. Again that break, that unspoken implication.

She was playing the most dangerous game in the world, and she was playing it not merely against a criminal, but against a man who held human life as the cheapest thing at his command. Her life would go out like a snuffed candle if her opponent suspected for a single instant the game she was playing.

"Heard what?" Stavinsky demanded.

"Oh, don't make me tell," she moaned.

"What did you hear?" he demanded. "Tell me, or I'll break every bone in your damned body."

Instead of answering, she countered with a question.

"Are you the leader of those men or is someone else?"

"I am, by God," he answered harshly. "What did you hear?"

"I heard someone talking," she said with reluctance, as if the words were being dragged from her against her will. "I couldn't see who it was. They were on deck and I was at the foot of the stairs. It was during the night. I had gone out to get a drink of water . . . and I heard something about taking the leadership away from you—about killing you—"

"Who was it?" he shot at her.

"I don't know," she protested. "I couldn't see them. It was dark. The voice sounded like an Englishman's."

"Morgan! The English swine!" He swore in Russian. "Was that all you heard?"

"Almost. They passed on down the deck and I didn't follow them."

"What else was there?"

"Something about some of the men being loyal to you because you arranged their escape—and something else about trying to win them over. And then someone said something about tonight—about killing you tonight. And that's all."

She came closer to him, looked up at him with eyes wide and trusting. "You won't let them hurt me?"

There was silence in the room for a moment. Vivian Legrand's brain was working coolly, methodically, judicially, but in her eyes was something more remorseless and deadly than any sudden flare of impetuous and unbridled anger. The cold unwinking stare of the snake about to strike.

Stavinsky slipped an arm over her shoulder. Her softness, the sight of her rounded shoulders showing beneath the thin covering, excited him.

"Don't worry, I won't let them harm you," he swore.

"I knew I could trust you," she said, and her body relaxed in the curve of his arm.

He bent over and kissed her. She strained away from him, and then, as she saw the door of her cabin begin to open, struggled furiously. She got one arm free and slapped him with all her force. He recoiled—and then over her shoulder caught sight of Morgan standing on the threshold, scowling. Stavinsky loosened his hold and whirled on the other.

"What are you doing here?" the Russian demanded savagely.

"HOW about you?" demanded Morgan curtly. He still held in one hand a slip of paper that Vivian Legrand knew must be the note she had sent him. "I thought we'd agreed that for the sake of peace on board, the woman was to be left alone? You know damn well that if the others find you're not playing straight with them about this girl, there'll be hell to pay."

Stavinsky thrust his head forward in a gorilla-like gesture.

"How about yourself?" he asked.

"Don't worry about me. I can handle my own affairs," the Englishman said evenly. "Now, you'd better get out, Ivan."

"Get out!" Stavinsky exploded. His mood was ugly, and for a moment it seemed that the two would come to blows there in her cabin. And that, Vivian Legrand knew, would spoil whatever chances her plan had of being successful. She moved between them.

"Yes, please go," she said to Stavinsky. And then, in the softest of whispers, added for his ears alone:

"You must not make him suspicious."

For a moment anger and craft warred in Stavinsky. The latter won. Without a word he turned on his heel and strode from the cabin. But his eyes as they swept across Morgan, in passing, were venomous.

A little thrill went through Vivian Legrand. She knew the seed she had planted would sprout and blossom. She waited until Stavinsky's footsteps clumped up the companionway stairs, outside. Then she swayed and reached out blindly for support.

"I think . . . I'm . . . going to faint," she murmured.

The Englishman crossed the room swiftly; caught her in his arms. She lay there supine for a moment, her eyes looking up into his, the flame of her hair cascading down across his arms. Then she pushed him away resolutely.

"You mustn't," she whispered tensely. "Oh, you don't know—you don't know—he's going to kill you."

"Not he," the Englishman scoffed. "He values his damned hide too much to try it."

"But he is, I tell you." There was a choken sob in her voice. She caught his hand, held it fiercely. The eyes she raised to his pleaded mutely for belief. "Tonight—he was telling me about it before you came in—I don't know all the details . . . but I know he plans to kill you and some of your men. He said some of the men were loyal to you, and those he couldn't win over to his side, he'd kill—along with you—tonight."

"Why, the damned crook," the Englishman marveled.

Vivian Legrand's brain was working swiftly, yet carefully.

"I didn't know when I wrote you that note. But I was afraid of him, and I wanted to ask you to protect me . . . and I was waiting here for you when the door opened and he came in . . . and then he told me . . . that he was going to kill you . . . and take the ship—" she paused dramatically—"and me."

"Oh, you won't let him, will you? If he kills you and becomes the undisputed leader, there is no one to protect me. Oh, you won't let him, will you? He can't win—you're the better man."

"Don't worry," the Englishman said grimly, "he won't win."

Vivian Legrand took his hand and moved him gently toward the door. There was a shadow of a smile in her eyes, but he did not see it.

"You must go now. You mustn't stay here. He might become suspicious. Might kill you without warning. If you wait until tonight—when he starts something—then you can be ready for him."

"I'll wait," Morgan said, and his lips were tight. "And I'll be ready."

She closed the door behind him and began hastily to dress. Her plan was under way. But there were many things to do.

VI

SHE was playing a desperate game, one of the most desperate games of her long and varied career. Any little trifle might betray to Stavinsky and Morgan the game she was playing. As the day went on, she knew that storm clouds were gathering about the two men. The forty murderers aboard seemed to be more and more, as hour after hour passed, gathering into two camps. There were glowering looks, muttered words.

Once a squabble between two men turned into a fight. She held her breath lest the moment for which she

was planning come too soon. But the two leaders quelled the fight with a stern hand.

The rajah she had not seen since the night the forty murderers had boarded them. In common with all officers of the ship, he was locked in his cabin, the keys in possession of one of the escaped prisoners who had been appointed jailer. The engine room crew were kept below decks, working under the menace of guns in the hands of their captors, who stood guard upon the engine room grating.

She managed a furtive meeting with Wylie, and outlined her plan to him and the part that he was to play. Unknown to their captors, she had a key to Wylie's cabin. Shortly before eight that night she would unlock his door. They would sneak to the deck and play their respective parts in the drama that was to follow—the drama that would result in freedom for themselves, or, if their plans failed, death at the hands of the infuriated criminals.

Vivian Legrand was reasonably familiar with a ship, as familiar as the average passenger, and she felt certain that she would carry out the plan she had set herself. It was shortly after seven when she softly slipped the key into the lock of Wylie's cabin and opened the door. Beneath her arm she carried a bulky package. Her white clothes had been changed for something dark that merged with the shadows of the night.

Wylie was waiting, tensely alert. She pressed a revolver into his hand, a revolver that she had stolen from one of the escaped convicts that afternoon.

"Everything set?" Wylie asked. She nodded.

"I'll wait," she said, "until I hear the first shot. Then I'll start."

Together they stole quietly to the deck. The ship was running through a moonless night, and a strange silence hung over her. Protective shadows clung thickly about the deck, cloaking the two masses of men huddling at opposite ends of the ship. Clustered about the bridge, where Vivian Legrand knew that Stavinsky was standing guard over the helmsman and officer on duty, were vague shapes she knew to be the Russian's adherents. Aft, beneath the awning, was the huddled group of Morgan's followers.

Wylie melted noiselessly into a shadow along the railing, vanished into the lee of a cluster of ventilators. Satisfied, Vivian Legrand turned, ran down the stairs, along a passage and turned into a little passage that ended in an open door.

Hot, moist air struck her in the face. She was on a narrow steel grating. Steel steps went down steeply. Below was the top of the engine and the tangle of piping and pumps that filled the cramped confines of the engine room. There was another platform just below the top of the engine. On it lounged the forms of the two convict guards. It was those two men on the platform with whom she was concerned.

Now she made her bid for freedom. Swiftly and noiselessly she undid the package under her arm, waited tensely there in the doorway, out of sight of the men below, for the signal.

It came. The sound of a shot from the deck above, clear above the pounding of the engine, and then a yell:

"Kill Stavinsky!"

Wylie was doing his part. He had fired that shot, just as he had planned, and then yelled that phrase. She knew that it would be confirmation of the tale that she had told Stavinsky. That he would immediately re-

taliate in kind on Morgan's faction, believing that the shot had come from them.

Instantly she tossed one of the bottles she held onto the platform where the two guards lounged. It shattered with a crash. She threw another and another. The floor of the platform was covered with a fuming liquid. The two figures that had been standing erect were wabbling now. Hands were pawing at blinded eyes, and they were gasping as the fumes of of the powerful ammonia choked them.

ABOVE, on the deck were shouts, yells, shots. Vivian Legrand leaned over the edge of the grating and called down to the men in the engine room.

"Come up!" she called. "The guards are blinded, and the men who captured the ship are fighting among themselves. This is our chance to get the ship back again. Hurry and free the rest of the crew!"

Then she raced for the deck. She still had something to do. It was no part of her plan that Stavinsky should be killed. He was too valuable to be wasted.

On the deck turmoil raged. Her plan had worked to perfection. The two rival factions, headed by Stavinsky and Morgan, were at one another's throats. Stavinsky's voice lifted above the turmoil of shouting men. She recognized it at once, among all the others. That voice held a tigerish, inhuman quality, like no other she had ever heard. A man came running past the entrance where she stood, then crashed to the deck and squeaked as he went down from a shot from the bridge.

Knives were flashing in the starlight, shots spat from shadows. The entrance to the companionway stairs was in the line of fire. Even as she reached it a bullet struck the steel lintel and whined off at a tangent.

Dropping to the deck she crawled along in the lee of the railing, whose canvas windbreak made a ribbon of impenetrable shadow along the lightness of the deck. Up on the bridge was Stavinsky, and she must reach that bridge.

A man lay sprawled on the deck near the railing, the gun he had been clutching when death overtook him lying within a few inches of his hand. She reached out and appropriated it.

She was almost at the foot of the bridge ladder when the first of the crew burst out from below. Shovels, crowbars, slice bars from the engine room formed their weapons. From the hand of one of them a revolver spat venomously toward the yelling, fighting knot of men on the deck, proving that the weapons on the two guards below had not been overlooked.

Their presence gave her the opportunity she was looking for. Stavinsky did not see her figure swing lightly up the ladder. The chief mate did. All during the fight he had been held motionless under the gun of the man on the bridge with Stavinsky. Now he redeemed himself.

He drove his right foot up from the floor with all the strength he could muster. The hard toe of the shoe slammed powerfully against the wrist of the guard's arm. The gun he held sailed down to the deck below.

Almost at the same instant Vivian Legrand's gun spoke. Stavinsky's companion gave a grunt and sank to the floor, even as the chief mate's fist slammed into Stavinsky's chin, again, and again until the man wilted and went down.

Vivian Legrand turned. Wylie was by her side. Their pistols spat flame and lead at the prisoners on the deck below. The first officer ran down to join in the fracas.

And even as he did so, a pencil of light streaked out—a searchlight stabbing across the water. Unnoticed by Vivian Legrand or the others, a ship had been steadily approaching them. Now she saw that it was a naval vessel.

Swiftly she dropped her gun, and with Wylie's assistance got the unconscious Stavinsky down to the latter's cabin. Then the two ran back to the deck.

The fight was over now. The escaped prisoners, those that were left, were a sorry sight. Bruised, battered and cut they stood disarmed in a ring of glowering men as a boatload of sailors from the British gunboat pulled alongside.

The Rajah of Salingar, released from his cabin by one of the officers, came on deck, exceedingly worried.

The officer who released him had told him of Vivian's courage in routing the forty murderers. The Rajah sought her out, deep gratitude on his lips.

"It was the least I could do," she said softly. "I got you into this mess. All that I ask is that you forgive me, and that you do the suggesting from now on."

The rajah was flattered.

"There is nothing to forgive," he said. "But if I may suggest, I would suggest the Riviera. I am sure you would enjoy it."

"Yes," Vivian said absently, for her startled eyes had seen Sir Mark Caywood, Chief of the British secret service in the Far East, coming over the rail with sailors from the gunboat. "I'm sure I would." Was this to be the end, after all her trouble?

Then she smiled her most serene smile; she knew that, search as Sir Mark might, he would never find Stavinsky. And she was right. They did not find him.

In the excitement of transferring the escaped convicts to be returned to Port Blair none of them noticed the lights of a Dutch cargo boat, bound to Port Blair on an errand that would never be accomplished.

VII

TWO weeks later, in Rangoon, she faced Sir Mark Caywood again. Their interview was almost at an end. In Vivian Legrand's handbag was a bundle of Bank of England notes that totaled up more money than she ever knew existed. Two hours after the rajah's yacht sailed from Rangoon, Sir Mark would receive a letter telling him where Stavinsky was being held, safely doped, in the Chinese section of the city.

Sir Mark rose from his desk as she turned to go.

"If ever you are in trouble out here, Mrs. Legrand," he said earnestly, "just manage to get word to me. I might be able to help you."

"Thank you," said Vivian Legrand demurely, "but I am sailing tomorrow for the Riviera. I am negotiating for an interest in a ruby mine—and I expect to acquire it there."

In the next episode Vivian Legrand begins her blackmailing career in Europe.

Coming soon! ***Watch for it!***

They watched Sammard bury the stolen money

The LADY from HELL

A True Story
By
Eugene Thomas

From the Confession of a Tortured Apache Vivian Legrand Frames a Devilish Scheme to Blackmail the Monte Carlo Banker: The Episode of the Grave Robbers

"BRING him in!" Vivian Legrand herself had opened the door of the little villa on the outskirts of Monte Carlo. Her greenish eyes narrowed and a grim smile of triumph flickered across her beautiful face as she saw that one of the three men who stood on the doorstep was a prisoner, with a gun shoved into his ribs.

Night and day, for more than a week, this prisoner had been dogging the footsteps of an old woman whom Vivian Legrand had selected as a likely victim to enrich the Legrand gang. And night and day her confederates had dogged the footsteps of both the man and the old woman, seeking some whispered hint of the information that Vivian Legrand sought. Now the long and patient shadowing was bearing fruit.

She stepped back to permit the two men to shove their prisoner through the door, then closed and locked it.

"Was there any trouble?" she inquired of Adrian Wylie, her chief assistant.

"No trouble," Wylie said. He looked as grim as the gun he was thrusting back into the concealed holster. "He came like a lamb to the slaughter."

The captive winced at the implication.

"Just wait until Raoul Valente hears of this," he said defiantly.

"Oh, so Raoul Valente is interested in the Signora Tomasino?" Vivian Legrand said softly, switching to French as flawless as that of a Parisienne. She looked at her prisoner with the unreadable, faintly slant-eyed gaze that, had he known her better, would have told him meant trouble. "I wondered . . . but I did not think of him. I was right, then. The affair is worthwhile."

Raoul Valente, at this time, shortly before the World War, was one of the leading figures of the Monte Carlo underworld. Clever, audacious, he had been suspected by the police of many things, but they had been unable to pin anything on him.

Vivian Legrand followed as the prisoner was hustled into a small room opening off the hall. She drew the heavy hangings across the windows.

"I do not think that I shall worry about Valente," she said. "He had best be careful himself, lest he find himself in the same trap that closed about his spy." She turned to Wylie. "Tie him up."

The man yelped shrilly and tried to dodge as the two men seized him, but his resistance was futile against the strength of the two. The other man held him down while Wylie tied each arm to the chair, lashed the feet together and fastened a running noose around his neck, the other end of the rope being tied to the rung of the chair.

Vivian Legrand watched with a lazy smile twitching at her lips. She had picked up a fluffy Persian cat that lay dozing on a chair and held its head close to her cheek.

"Dear Cleo," she cooed to the animal, her eyes watching the man in the chair. "So lazy, so useless—but so beautiful."

The resemblance between the eyes of the cat and her own was remarkable. In them both was the same greenish glint, and in their depths lay the same hint of latent cruelty that might spring to life at any moment. As she stroked the animal her bracelet caught in its thick fur and pulled. A feline paw came out and raked Babe's white arm.

A BLAZE of ferocity shown in the eyes of the woman. With a swift gesture she hurled the beautiful animal across the room. It struck the stone fireplace with a thud, dropped to the floor and lay there motionless, mewing a little, with eyes fixed piteously on the woman who had been stroking it a moment before.

But Vivian Legrand did not accord the stricken animal a second glance. She leaned forward, her hands on the edge of the table, her smile cruel as she watched the shrinking figure in the chair. Her voice, when she spoke, was as soft as the purr of the cat she had held.

"You have just one chance of leaving this room alive, Vincente Delgado," she advised him. "Tell me what I want to know, and you can go."

The shadow of the callous cruelty he had just witnessed had not left the man's face. He was tall and slender; a Greek or an Italian, dressed in spotless white flannels and sport shoes. The clear olive of his face was set off by a small waxen mustache under a

slender acquiline nose. The hands were long and supple and slender; almost the hands of a woman—or a professional killer.

"What do you want to know?" he muttered in French.

"Where does the Signora Tomasino get the money that she loses at the gambling tables?"

"I don't know what you mean," the man said. "I do not know the Signora Tomasino. You have come to the wrong man for information."

"Don't lie!" Vivian Legrand spat at him. "I know that you watch her every night at the Casino. You follow her from table to table. Yet you are careful to keep out of her sight—careful that she does not know that you watch her. She is not wealthy. She lives in one room in a house that a pig would turn up its nose at. Yet she has a card for the Casino, and she loses thousands of francs nightly at roulette and *chemin de fer*. I know these things. But I wish to know where the money comes from. If you desire to live, tell me. If not—"

She shrugged. No need to finish the sentence to make her meaning clear.

Delgado's voice cracked as he said: "I don't know. God help me, I don't know."

"That is too bad," Vivian Legrand said calmly. "Perhaps you will know more after a little—er—treatment."

"Treatment?" the man said uneasily.

"Yes," she said. Reaching over to the table, she picked up a little leather case. It contained a hypodermic needle and two tiny phials, one filled with a colored liquid and the other with a clear substance. "Even in the most obstinate cases of do-not-knowness, this has been known to work wonders."

Picking out the colored phial she held it before Delgado's eyes, so that he might see the label: *Poison.*

The man stared and stared.

Two drops of sweat splashed from his forehead. His eyes, venomous with hatred and fear, watched Vivian Legrand.

"You see, poison," she said sweetly. She drew the cork and carefully filled

VIVIAN LEGRAND

the barrel of the needle. "In the event that you are not familiar with the stuff, you might like to know that it kills—oh, quite painlessly—in about fifteen minutes after it is injected. That is, unless an antidote is injected before it is too late. This"—she held up the other phial—"is the antidote."

"But—you wouldn't poison me!" gasped Delgado, staring at the phial as though it were his death warrant.

"I shall inject the poison," Vivian Legrand went on evenly. "But if you are willing to talk, I shall inject the antidote. If not, when the fifteen minutes are up, the two men who brought

you here will simply toss your body over the cliffs into the sea."

Wylie's companion looked closely at Vivian. Hardened Apache though he was, he was unable to credit her with the serious intention of putting the thing she threatened into practice. Several years later, when the exploits of the Legrand gang of blackmailers were the talk of the underworld, the Apache, boasting of his early connection with the gang, told his comrades that at first it seemed incredible to him that any woman could have the iron strength of will, the ruthlessness, to put such a thing through. But one look at Vivian Legrand's blazing eyes made him realize that this was not an empty threat.

SHE rolled up the prisoner's sleeve. He shrank back, struggling to escape the needle she held poised. But it was useless. The tight ropes, allowed him no leeway. She pinched up the flesh of his upper arm and despite his frenzied protests, injected the contents of the syringe.

The man's face was drawn in terror as she stepped back.

"The first symptom," her relentless voice went on, "will be a slight pain in the arm, followed by a numbness, gradually spreading through the arm and from there to the shoulder. There will be no further pain. As the poison spreads through the system, the numbness will follow. until it reaches the heart.

"After that," she added significantly, "it won't matter. So you had better talk before then."

"But I can't tell you anything!" Delgado wailed. He was straining forward against his bonds, gasping, greenish of face. His body shook. "I don't know anything! I swear I don't. I don't know the woman you are talking about. I tell you I don't!"

Vivian Legrand glanced at her watch. "The antidote must be injected at least three minutes before the fifteenth minute is up. You have now just eleven more minutes in which to talk."

Fear clung to the man like an aura, hung in the still room like a tangible thing. But still he insisted that he did not know the information she wanted. Minute after minute passed, and from time to time, Vivian Legrand spoke, her words falling in the silence like fateful things.

"Ten minutes more."

She paused and showed him the label on the phial.

Delgado's voice cracked and he gave a hollow groan.

"I don't know . . . I don't know!"

"Five minutes."

She washed out the syringe at the hand basin and filled it with the clear liquid from the other phial.

"Four minutes."

Clearly, ever so clearly, her words dropped into the stillness, flogging the man with the lash of fear. From the look in the man's eyes she knew that she had won.

"Valente . . . he would kill me . . . he is a devil, that one," the man moaned.

"Better possible death later than certain death now," Vivian Legrand pressed on relentlessly. "He need never know. He will not know."

She held the syringe over the wash basin, her thumb on the plunger.

"When the time is up I shall empty the syringe into the basin."

"The antidote, the antidote," the man pleaded. "Give me the antidote! I'll talk." His face was shrunken and drawn with fear, his breath coming in little panting gasps. "Give me the antidote, for God's sake."

"Talk," Vivian Legrand said relentlessly.

In a tumble of words, their flight winged by the death that hovered over him, the story was poured out. The Signora Tomasino formerly kept a small shop in Marseille, a fence for thieves. Then one day her daughter, Camilla, caught the eye of Paul Sammard, a private banker. He was pouring out money on Camilla like water.

And, true to her type, the old woman was bleeding her daughter, in order to have funds which to gamble at the tables. Raoul Valente had been watching the old woman, hoping to stumble onto something that would give him a chance to share in the funds that the old woman wasted so liberally. That was why he, Delgado, had been watching her night after night.

Vivian Legrand nodded. She had learned the link in the chain that she wanted to know.

"Quick, the antidote. For God's sake!" gasped the man. Beads of sweat were on his face.

Vivian Legrand's answer was to cross to the basin and empty the syringe into it.

The man's eyes followed her, and as he grasped the significance of the movement, a bubbling scream of horror and despair rose to his lips.

"You fool," Vivian Legrand said scornfully to the huddled figure on the chair, "did you think that I would let you live to tell Raoul Valente that we are on the trail of the same fox? There was no antidote. That was only water in that other phial."

She turned to Wylie.

"It will only take about five minutes more," she said calmly. "I told him fifteen, but it actually takes twenty minutes. There are chains in the cellar. When it is over, fasten the chains to him and throw him over the cliff. The water is deep there."

Turning on her heel she walked out of the room as another despairing, bubbling scream rose from the foam-flecked lips of the dying man.

II

VIVIAN LEGRAND and Wylie had come to Monte Carlo as the guests of the reigning Rajah of Salingar. Making his acquaintance in the Far East in a scheme in which she had been the lure, they had become friends with him, and had used the Rajah's official standing and his yacht as a front to defy the English Secret Service.

Vivian Legrand herself had blackmailed Sir Mark Caywood, chief of the Secret Service in the Far East, of three thousands pounds for the return of an important document that had been stolen. Following that, she had kidnaped a political prisoner who held the key to a political secret and sold him to Sir Mark for a staggering sum. The Rajah, altogether unsuspecting of the real character of his lovely guest and her companion, had turned the yacht's nose toward Monte Carlo.

Some ten days before he had been called to Paris on business, and Vivian, ever alert for an opportunity to line her pockets, had become more and more interested in the old woman, Signora Tomasino, whom she saw in the Casino nearly every night. It had not been long before she was aware that others, too, were interested in the *signora*. Wylie had shadowed her to the squalid house where she lived several times, and each time he had noticed that the same man who had been watching her in the Casino had followed her home also.

It had not taken them long to find

that there was no wealthy Tomasino family with an elderly member addicted to gambling. Checking up on her through casual conversation with Casino attendants, Vivian Legrand found that the old woman had been losing large sums of money for several months. But try as they might, they could not determine the source of her wealth.

Then she had hit upon the expedient of extorting the information from the man who had been shadowing her. And now she had the thread in her hands. She knew, of course, who Sammard was—the junior partner of the private banking house of Courtois, Sammard et Cie., one of the most prominent on the Riviera.

But Sammard himself had never been considered a particularly wealthy man, and it would take a wealthy man to furnish the funds that the old woman squandered at the Casino. He was a partner in the business because of the fact that his late wife had been the daughter of Courtois, founder of the banking firm. Vivian Legrand was still turning the puzzle over in her mind when Adrian Wylie came into the room.

Wylie's brain was stuffed with every kind of ancient, medieval and modern lore. He never stopped reading and he never forgot anything. A scholar by inclination, he was only a professional crook and swindler in order to obtain money. And he could not have continued to be a successful crook had it not been for his association with the girl who sat before him.

"Well, we've got the trail of the fox at last," Wylie said with satisfaction, "and dead men tell no tales."

Vivian Legrand n o d d e d, her thoughts still fixed upon the puzzle that confronted her. The man's fate troubled her no more than the fate of the cat she had hurled so callously against the stone fireplace. That was like her. Through the whole course of her career as the world's most successful blackmailer, she permitted nothing in the way of scruples to stand in her way. She swept a man's life as ruthlessly, as surely, as she would his career, or his reputation.

"This thing is bigger than I thought," she said slowly. "My first thought was that the old woman was blackmailing someone. But that's out. Now, how does Camilla get the money she gives her mother, plus the greater sums she squanders on herself? From Sammard, undoubtedly. And where does Sammard get it? He has not a great fortune. Most of his money came to him from his wife."

In the back of her eyes a light flamed and went out again. Wylie saw it, recognized it. He said once that it was the warning signal that came into her eyes when her mind was clicking. It was a little flicker of triumph that she could not control.

"There is only one place that Sammard can get that money," she told Wylie. "He is robbing the bank of which he is a partner, or he is robbing Courtois, or else he is robbing those who trust the banking house with their deposits. Doc, it's a perfect setup for us."

"Suppose he is?" Wylie asked. "We've no proof that we could hold over his head. If he is clever enough to rob his bank without being suspected, he is clever enough to cover it up deeply enough so that we could never discover it."

"Courtois, the partner of Sammard, is a man of the old school," Vivian said thoughtfully. "He would do anything to keep the name of Courtois from being smirched by scandal. Yes,

Doc, the setup is quite perfect for us."

"You can't blackmail old Courtois because of his partner's thievery," Wylie expostulated. "He would simply make good the losses and kick Sammard out."

"Exactly," Vivian Legrand said triumphantly. "So we'll have to work through the girl, Camilla. She's no fool. She knows something is up." She turned toward the door. "Now listen!" And into Wylie's ears she poured a plan that made him gasp with admiration.

III

VIVIAN LEGRAND stopped her car a few doors from the house she intended to break into, dismissed it and walked. Though her scheme was wild enough, she could think of no other way to put her plan into effect.

The building she sought had five stories and contained ten apartments, two on each floor, with a big entrance lobby always open. Rather than be seen using the elevator she mounted the stairs to the third floor. The hall was deserted.

She rang the bell of one of the apartments, although she was certain that the apartment was empty. There was no reply. She tried the door. It was secured by a lock which she could not break open without making a noise.

She moved down the hall to the back door, which gave inward like the front. This door had a different lock. An old-fashioned one. Taking out the slender rod of thin steel which Wylie had given her, she forced it slowly back of the weather strip on a level with the lock. The rod scraped on metal. She worked it up and down, slowly pressing inward. Bit by bit the sloping tongue of the lock was forced back into its sheath, until the blade slipped through. A twist of the door handle and she was looking into a large kitchen.

A moment later she was inside the apartment with the door closed and locked as she had found it.

On quick, light feet she searched the place. The drawing room had windows

DOC WYLIE

on the street. Off this led an inner room, a bedroom.

Tense and alert she searched the drawers of the dresser, trained fingers leaving everything as they found it. The desk held nothing of interest. She cast about to look elsewhere.

Suddenly the front door slammed.

She stood motionless a moment, as sounds came from the drawing room that told that the newcomer was moving about. Then they ceased. Silently she tiptoed to the portière that masked the door to the drawing room and peered through.

The room was empty.

Her eyes were still searching the room when there came a slight sound behind her. She whirled.

In the kitchen doorway stood Camilla, a revolver in her hand covering Vivian Legrand, the light from the window revealing her coils of glistening black hair, eyes like dark pools, white teeth and olive tinted skin. Standing there with her gun trained on Vivian, Camilla had all of the strained nonchalance of a woman who has unexpectedly walked into a cage of tigers.

"Put your hands up," she said in crisp French. "Do not move, or I shall shoot."

"Don't be a fool," Vivian Legrand answered arrogantly. She went on harshly.

"If you start anything I shall be compelled to arrest you—and I prefer not to."

A slight movement of the summer muff she carried disclosed the fact that her own gun, hidden in its depths, was covering the girl.

The whole thing was, plainly, not what the girl had expected. As for Vivian Legrand, her exquisite face betrayed no more than a slight smile: no sign of astonishment, no flutter of panic.

"Arrest me?" faltered the girl.

"Yes," Vivian Legrand told her quietly. "I am of the police. But I am not here officially. If I were, I would be compelled to arrest you. I am betraying my duty because of your mother."

"My mother?" the girl queried.

"Yes, the Signora Tomasino. Once, many years ago she did me a service. A very great service. And I have come to return that service by aiding her daughter."

The girl sat down slowly. She was still trembling, and for a moment the two women eyed one another after the manner of strange cats. But, despite the girl's evident fear, Vivian Legrand was conscious of her appraising look, a look that swept Vivian from the casque of flaming red hair to the hem of the sports dress she wore.

"How can you aid me?" the girl asked finally. "I have done nothing that the police could be interested in."

"Except receive stolen goods," Vivian Legrand snapped. "That is why I am here—to warn you. If you are wise, you will leave Monte Carlo. If you stay you will be arrested, tried and sent to prison with your lover."

"You mean—" faltered the girl completely unnerved by the fact that this woman seemed to know everything.

"Exactly," Vivian Legrand told her. "Paul Sammard, junior partner of the banking firm of Courtois, Sammard et Cie. The police know that he is your lover. They know that for months he has been robbing his bank of huge sums of money to squander on you. What they do not know, because I have been faithless to my duty and have not reported it, is that a large part of this money you have passed on to your mother. It was when I learned that she was your mother that I determined to try and save you, if I could."

For a moment the girl was silent, dubious. Then she said in a tremulous voice:

"But what shall I do?"

"Leave Monte Carlo," Vivian told her instantly. "Not today, or tonight, but before Monday morning. Because then the police will swoop down upon the bank. Sammard and his thievery will be discovered. If you are still here you will be arrested, also."

She moved toward the door.

"Just one thing more. On no condition tell Sammard of the warning that I have given you. There is still a

great deal of money in the vaults of the bank that he has not stolen. If he knew he was suspected he would take all of the money and flee. So you must not warn him."

Without another word she slipped out of the door and closed it behind her.

There was a satisfied smile on Vivian Legrand's face as she rang for the elevator. The jaws of the trap were closing.

IV

FOR two days, scarcely a move of Sammard's had been missed by Vivian Legrand's agents. They had been close on his heels when he entered his bank the morning before. They had shadowed him when he left the bank for lunch. They knew that Camilla had repeated Vivian Legrand's conversation to him, as she had intended. They surmised, if they did not know, the contents of the bulging dispatch case that had accompanied him when he left the bank that evening.

Wylie himself had been at Sammard's elbow when he had purchased a compartment for Italy for Saturday night, and tonight's move was entirely expected.

Vivian Legrand and Wylie had been waiting in a car drawn up on the further side of the street when Sammard emerged from the girl's apartment, still carrying the briefcase, and got into a waiting car.

All her life Vivian Legrand was guided by what Wylie maintains was a rare sense of intuition. Something made her perfectly confident of Sammard. He had committed himself too deeply, she told her companion, to remain in Monte Carlo. He had known that the time would eventually come when he would have to flee, and he would never take a chance on the police finding any of his stolen loot in his possession by a surprise raid. He would hide it somewhere. But where? That was what she intended to find out that night, for upon that hung the success or failure of her scheme.

Sammard's car moved off down the street. She followed. As the two cars reached less congested streets on the outskirts of the city, Wylie, who was driving, had to fall further back to keep from being noticed, but managed to always keep the taillight in sight.

Then Sammard's car made a sudden left turn. For an instant its headlights shone along a side road. Then they vanished.

The end of the chase was at hand. Sammard's car had turned into a large cemetery that lay on the slopes between the mountains and the sea.

Stopping their car, Vivian and Wylie crept through the unguarded gates of the cemetery on foot and stole down the roadway until they could see Sammard.

They watched cautiously as he removed a wreath of flowers that lay beside a headstone, burrowed in the heaped up earth that covered the grave, and deposited in the hollow of a number of packages from the dispatch case he carried.

He was burying the money he had stolen from his banking firm in his wife's grave.

Silently the two watched until Sammard straightened up and glanced about furtively. They stole down the road toward their car.

There was only one road that Sammard could use to get back to town. Down this road Wylie drove their car. Just past an intersection he stopped, turned the car so that the headlights illuminated the road. They waited until

they saw the lights of a car approaching. Vivian Legrand stepped into the glare of the headlights from their own car, and waved a handkerchief.

The car came to a halt a few feet from them. Sammard stepped out.

To him Vivian told her story. She was an American heiress, traveling with her guardian. Their car had broken down. Would he be kind enough to give her a lift into town, so that she could send back assistance to her guardian, who would in the meanwhile remain with their broken-down car?

Sammard agreed readily. Not once did suspicion enter his mind that the whole thing was a plant.

VIVIAN LEGRAND lay back in the seat of Sammard's open car, a short cape of fur flung over her shoulders, talking lightly to the banker. They had covered half the distance back to Monte Carlo before she sprang her second trap.

"I wonder," she said hesitantly, in her low, throbbing voice, "if you are sufficiently familiar with Monte Carlo to recommend me to a banking house with international connections?"

"But naturally," Sammard answered with a smile. "I myself am of the firm of Courtois, Sammard et Cie. We are fully equipped to handle any kind of banking business that *madamoiselle* might care to entrust to us."

Vivian Legrand expressed her delight at finding a banker, and before she left him at her hotel had made an appointment to meet Sammard the following morning at his bank to deposit a large sum of money with his firm.

Despite Sammard's effort at polite unconcern as he made the appointment, she caught the tension in the banker's manner. It was eloquent of the fact that already he saw this American woman's funds in his hands. The fish had seen the bait, and Vivian Legrand felt sure that he would swallow the hook.

Soon after she left the banker, Wylie picked her up. They went to the cemetery, where they unearthed the money that Sammard had buried.

The next morning Vivian Legrand and Wylie appeared at the banking house of Courtois, Sammard et Cie. They were immediately ushered into the office of the junior partner. Vivian was polished, poised . . . emotionally untouched, hiding beneath her exotic polished beauty and suave manner the smoldering purpose that was fast sending her to the pinnacle of her particular field of crime.

Wylie, too, seemed the efficient, intelligent man of business as he sat there, leaning forward slightly, his hands crossed over the crook of his stick.

Within half an hour the two of them had left the bank again with a receipt signed by both Sammard and his white-haired partner for 300,000 pre-war francs—worth more than $60,000. Most of this was the result of their criminal operations in the Far East. But, unknown to Sammard, some 75,000 francs of this sum was his own stolen money, unearthed from his wife's grave.

That was Thursday morning. That afternoon Sammard instructed his secretary that he would be out of town for several days on business, and left a note for his father-in-law, Courtois, saying that he was leaving for Paris to be gone several days.

When he left the bank late that afternoon the 300,000 francs of Vivian Legrand left with him in the dispatch case. From that moment on he was

never out of sight of a member of the Legrand gang. When he left Camilla's apartment, Vivian and Wylie again trailed him toward the cemetery.

She was taking no chances. There was the possibility of a breakdown; the possibility that they might not reach the spot in time, and she had no desire to see her 300,000 francs vanish into Italy with an absconding banker.

Earlier in the night she had planted a confederate in a car a little beyond the gates of the cemetery, with instructions to follow Sammard quietly when he arrived.

They were not far behind Sammard's car when he turned into the cemetery, as he had done the night before. Further on, beneath a tree, was the dark bulk of the car where the confederate was hidden.

The car seemed very silent as they approached it. And then Wylie says that he knew Vivian's intuition was working, that intuition that many times over was to warn her that danger was near long before the shadow of it had fallen across her path. For she broke into a little run.

There was nobody in the driver's seat of the car when they reached it. But the slant of the moon's dim rays through the opposite window showed them the interior of the car. Half on the floor and half on the seat lay the driver, blood slowly oozing from a wound on the back of his head. It was obvious that the man had been watching the approaching car through the rear window of his own, when he was struck down.

V

"TROUBLE," Vivian Legrand whispered to Wylie. "Someone ahead of us. Valente, probably. He may have been following Sammard on the chance that he could pick up something."

They shut the door of the car softly started toward the gates of the cemetery. The road was dusty and soft. Their feet made no sound.

Crouching as they moved from one patch of darkness to another, they advanced close to the grave of Sammard's wife.

The snap of a twig not far ahead brought them to a sudden halt in the shadow. All at once there was a rush of feet. Sammard dashed past them, running at full speed, the bulging dispatch case in his arms. Close on his heels came a little knot of men.

Ahead of the running figure of Sammard a man leaped from the shadows into the road. A dagger of orange flame stabbed the darkness and a scream of pain came from Sammard. He took one or two stumbling steps, and crumpled up in the roadway, dropping the dispatch case. Instantly the man who had fired pounced on it. Another instant and the little knot of running men had joined him.

Almost immediately Vivian Legrand darted out, followed by Wylie. In her hand she carried the gun that never left her. Wylie, too, had his automatic.

The men were too engrossed in the dispatch case to notice the movement in the darkness. At the last instant one of them gave a surprised grunt and half turned. Wylie shot. Without a groan the man slumped and fell sprawling almost across the body of the banker.

"Drop your guns!" Wylie ordered sharply. "You haven't a chance."

For an astonished moment the group of men stood frozen, crowded together. Seeing them clearly for the first time, Vivian Legrand knew that her first thought had been right. She was dealing with Valente and his gang.

One man at the edge of the group suddenly darted for the nearest clump of bushes. Before he had taken two steps she fired and dropped him on his face.

"There are plenty more where that came from," she told them crisply. "If you want bullets, I'll give them to you. I will, if you don't drop those guns."

There was only a moment's hesitation. Then four guns dropped to the roadway.

"That's better," snapped Wylie. "Now step forward into the moonlight. Line up and let's have a look at you. Do as you're told, you scum. There—hold it."

"Throw that dispatch case toward me," Vivian Legrand ordered the man who held it.

The man tossed it toward her formless shape in the shadows.

"Thank you," she said sweetly "Now the guns. Toss them this way also." She waited until the man had gathered up the discarded guns and thrown them in her direction, then spoke again.

"Now listen! You, Raoul Valente—step out from the others."

One of the men stepped forward unwillingly.

"You have a reputation as a knife-thrower," Vivian Legrand told him smoothly. "Take that knife from beneath your armpit and throw it over your shoulders as far as you can into the bushes."

Valente reached inside his shirt, drew out the long knife, raised his hand to toss it over his shoulder—and suddenly hurled it at her shadowy figure.

It thudded into the trunk of a tree against which she had been standing a moment before. With the gliding ease of a cat she had moved at the first flexing of his arm to throw, and almost as the knife thudded into the tree she fired. A snarl of rage or pain came from Valente as the bullet smashed through his right wrist.

"You won't throw a knife for a long time, my friend," she mocked him.

She stooped, picked up the dispatch case and melted into the shadows with Wylie.

VI

JUST a few moments after the doors of Courtois, Sammard et Cie. opened the next morning Vivian Legrand and Wylie presented themselves. M. Sammard, they were told, was out of town, and would not return; but Monsieur Courtois, the senior partner, would see them.

Vivian and Wylie exchanged glances in which there was something of relief. Sammard's body had not yet been discovered, so that factor would not complicate matters.

"I regret exceedingly," Vivian Legrand told Courtois, when he appeared, "that we must alter our plans. But I have just received a cablegram from New York and must sail at once."

The cablegram she extended was faked, of course, but so genuine did it appear that even an employee of the cable company would have been deceived. Then Vivian Legrand extended her receipt for 300,000 francs.

"In view of our sudden departure," she said smilingly, "I shall have to withdraw my funds."

They waited in tense anxiety as Courtois himself went to the vaults to obtain their money.

Within a few minutes Courtois returned, white-faced, grim.

"I regret," he said curtly, "that there will be a delay. There has been an accident—a robbery."

"Robbery!" Vivian Legrand said

sharply. "But why should a robbery concern us? Am I to understand that Courtois, Sammard et Cie. is unable to pay its honest debts?"

"For the moment, *madamoiselle,* I fear that it is impossible," retorted the old Frenchman.

"I do not believe it," Vivian Legrand told him crisply. "My money was deposited here only yesterday. Today you tell me that you are unable to pay. You are attempting to trick me."

"Believe me, *madamoiselle,*" the man said, "if you will but give me time—"

"I must leave Monte Carlo today," she put in sharply. "I cannot give you time. If you cannot produce my money, it can mean but one thing—that your banking house has failed."

"Today," said the old man curtly, "the robbers have left hardly sufficient cash in the vaults to transact the day's business. Tomorrow, when I call in my loans—"

"Then there is nothing to do," Vivian Legrand interrupted, "save consult my lawyer and see if he can save something from the ruins."

"If you make public the fact that the bank has been robbed, we will be ruined," the old banker said.

"But you are ruined."

"I can make good my losses if I am given time. I have a large private fortune. I can borrow. If you will only give me time, no one will lose a penny."

"I cannot wait," Vivian Legrand told him. "If you are in a position to pay me, I will keep silent about the robbery. Otherwise not."

For the first time Wylie spoke.

"I am not familiar with the laws of Monaco," he said smoothly, "but it seems to me that that is compounding a felony. In America or England it would be. And that places us, of course, in a rather dangerous position." Before the banker could speak he went on. "Naturally, if we are being placed in a dangerous position because we are willing to save a fine old banking house from ruin, that matter should be taken into consideration."

"Naturally," Vivian Legrand said. "I am sure that you appreciate that fact, do you not? We have on deposit here the sum of 300,000 francs. Now, your reputation in Monte Carlo banking circles is good. Your credit is excellent. We will wait here, while you approach your colleagues. If you are able to borrow 350,000 francs, we will keep silent about the condition of your bank. But if—"

"But you have on deposit here only 300,000 francs!" the banker snapped.

"I KNOW," Vivian Legrand told him, "but under the circumstances, the extra 50,000 francs can be considered as a bonus. Surely it is worth the extra 50,000 to you to stave off ruin. If not—"

The old man sat perfectly still. He looked for mercy in Vivian Legrand's eyes. There was none.

"Very well," he said, grimly. "To save the name of Courtois from disgrace, I will even pay a—er—bonus. Will you wait here until my return, please?"

He was gone for more than an hour. When he returned he placed in Vivian Legrand's hands 350,000 francs.

Vivian Legrand fights the chief of the Turkish underworld. Watch for "The Episode of the Levantine Monster." Coming soon!

The LADY from HELL

The Episode of the Levantine Monster

A beam of light moved slowly up to her face

The Devilish Guile of Vivian Legrand Forces the Monster of the Turkish Underworld to Sell His Own Accomplice into the Harem

A True Story

By Eugene Thomas

VIVIAN LEGRAND watched the disappearing lights of Monte Carlo with something akin to relief. Each turn of the ship's propeller was taking her further away from police officials who might, if the occasion arose, become exceedingly inquisitive about the large sum of money she had blackmailed out of Monte Carlo's leading banker. Then, too, there would undoubtedly be a disturbance over the death of Paul Sammard, the junior partner of the banking firm, and it was undoubtedly wiser to be on the way to Constantinople than in Monte Carlo when the storm broke.

Standing by the rail she gave the appearance of some great lady of the world. There was nothing about her to indicate that she was as deadly as a striking snake. And, as more than one of her victims could testify, she was as merciless, as utterly devoid of the usual human emotions as a statue. The

weak rays from the deck light caught her red hair and caused it to take on something of the nature of a quivering flame above the exquisitely modeled, exotic face.

Suddenly, warned by some inner sense of the presence of another person, she turned with that catlike grace that always characterized her every movement and saw, directly behind her, the slim silhouette of a man—so close to her, in fact, that she instinctively threw out her elbow to avoid collision, while the other hand automatically dropped into the pocket of her light tweed coat to grasp the revolver she carried there.

The man halted abruptly.

"Pardon, *mademoiselle*," he said in French that was strongly accented, and moved the fraction of a step nearer. "In the dim light I mistook *mademoiselle* for a friend."

Then he stepped back as the deck steward came around the corner of the deckhouse and started folding up the deck chairs for the night. Without another word the stranger made a slight bow and moved on down the deck. But not before Vivian Legrand had noticed that one of his hands was deep in the pocket of the coat he wore, much in the manner of her own hand clutching the revolver in her pocket.

Nor had the man's accent escaped her. It was of the East. Perhaps Greek, perhaps Turkish.

Her eyes went back speculatively to the rail of the ship against which she had been standing. How easy it would have been to stun her with a blow from behind, and then consign her body to the waters over which she had been leaning.

But why? She could assign no reason. Certainly not the police. Agents of the French Sûreté certainly would not adopt such methods.

She moved on down the deck in a shimmer of light-struck silk, still turning the affair over in her mind, made her way down to her cabin and threw

VIVIAN LEGRAND

open the door—to stop in amazement upon the threshold.

THE cabin had been searched, searched thoroughly and carefully. Her dressing case was empty and the bottom had been slit with a sharp knife to make sure that it held no secret pocket. Dresses had been ripped from their hangers in the little clothes closet and tossed onto the floor until it looked as though a dozen birds of paradise had moulted there. The handle on her hand mirror had been snapped, perhaps on the assumption that it might be hollow. Not a thing in the room had been left untouched.

"So," she said softly, "that was *not* a mistake up there on the deck."

Sudden consternation flooded her. Swiftly she stepped inside the cabin,

locked the door. Upon the wall hung a little drawing. Hurriedly taking it down she turned it over. The purser's receipt for the valuables she had deposited with him was still fastened to the back of the picture with the two pins she had used.

Satisfied on this point, she replaced the picture and set about righting the damage that had been done. And all the time her brain was working swiftly, with smooth precision. Now she knew the reason for the attempt on her life, there on the deck, and the reason for the search of her cabin.

Thoughtfully she poured out a glass of water from the carafe and put the glass to her lips. Then she put the glass down without drinking and rang for her room steward.

When he answered she handed him the glass of water.

"Drink this," she ordered curtly.

The steward, puzzled, took the glass and raised it to his lips. But before he could swallow Vivian Legrand struck the glass from his hand. It crashed on the carpet of her cabin and splashed his white coat with water.

The man recoiled and looked at her with amazement.

"When did you fill the water bottle?" she demanded.

"This afternoon, *madame*," he replied. "You were here at the time, if you remember."

"I remember now. I'm sorry," she said slowly. "I had forgotten, and the water seemed stale."

"Shall I bring you fresh water, *madame?*" he asked.

"No," Vivian told him. "That is all."

But she had not forgotten and her eyes were deadly as the door closed behind the man. The water was poisoned. It had been poisoned during the time that she had been absent. The faintly bitter odor of almonds that rose from it was unmistakable. Whoever her enemy was, he meant to leave no stone unturned to kill her. It was evident that the steward was not concerned in the affair. He would have swallowed the water if she had not knocked the glass from his lips.

Quietly she went out into the corridor and, glancing about to make sure that no one was in sight, made her way to the cabin occupied by Adrian Wylie, her companion in crime.

The moment she entered the room he sensed that something was amiss and dropped the book he was reading. Swiftly she outlined to him the two attempts upon her life.

"Somebody," she finished succinctly, "knows that we have close to a million francs in bank notes and jewels—and that somebody means to have them."

"Valente," Wylie said thoughtfully.

II

VALENTE was a French criminal, a leader of the underworld in Monte Carlo, whom Vivian Legrand had outwitted and outshot in a struggle for the stolen funds of Paul Sammard, the banker. She had broken the man's wrist with a shot as a parting souvenir.

She shook her head emphatically at the mention of the name.

"Not enough brains. A shooting affair in a dark alley—a knife thrust into my back from the shadows—a body robbed and quietly disposed of—yes. That much he is capable of. But not this. This is big-time stuff."

"Who else knows that we have that much money?" Wylie said. "That is the crux. Whoever it is isn't taking a shot in the dark. *They know.*"

"Right," Vivian Legrand said

thoughtfully. "Whoever it is knows."

She stopped and a slightly startled look flashed in her eyes.

"There is only one person who knows that we have that money. Camilla."

Wylie's eyes narrowed in thought for a moment, and he nodded slowly. "Camilla. Yes, it might be that Camilla is mixed up in this."

"That means," Vivian Legrand said, "that Camilla bargained with someone for a share of the money we took from Sammard, in return for the tip on who had it. That someone is on board, of course; and Camilla, being no fool, is undoubtedly waiting at our first port of call for her cut. Tomorrow night we are in Naples. That was why he tried tonight, in the hope of being able to go ashore tomorrow with the money."

"Whoever it is may not be playing a lone hand," Wylie warned her. "There may be others here on board."

"One or a dozen," Vivian said recklessly. "If they want war, we'll fight."

"They have the advantage of us," Wylie pointed out. "We are fighting in the dark. They are not. We don't know who they are."

"We will tomorrow," she said grimly. With a curt "Good night!" she went out and made her way to her own cabin.

TWO hours later Vivian Legrand was lying in her berth, wakeful, the lights off, unable to sleep because of the heat, which pressed down upon the steamer like a giant hand. And suddenly she had become conscious of a round hole in the center of the copper screening that covered the porthole — a hole that had not been there a moment before, perhaps an inch across, which looked like it had been carefully cut with a sharp knife.

She lay very still, listening like a cat, her eyes glued upon the porthole. And, while she looked, the black silhouette of a man's head loomed against the light outside.

It moved as she stared at it. A deck hand, perhaps. Again, perhaps not. She glanced at the luminous dial of her wrist watch. Eight minutes after two.

The glow outside the porthole gave birth to a hand, stamped momentarily in relief upon the lighted circle, and withdrew into the shadows that had yielded it. Vivian waited, motionless, barely breathing. Then she became cognizant of the fact that a face was peering in upon her. No light was cast upon it. The silhouette might have been cut out of black paper and suspended there. And she knew that invisible eyes in that black outline were staring into the cabin.

Never had she felt more keenly that death was stealing toward her soundlessly and unseen. Narrowing her eyes to mere slits, even though the room was in darkness, she watched breathlessly. The dull beat of the ship's engines, the slap of the waves, the whisper of wind, came clear and distinct.

Suddenly a beam of light flashed across the bed. Her eyes were closed. She seemed in deep repose. It darted across the tumbled cover, moved slowly up to her face and rested there for a short moment. For perhaps ten seconds it played upon her, as if that silent and sinister watcher outside the window were assuring himself that it was indeed Vivian Legrand lying there asleep in the bed.

Then the light flashed off.

She was out of bed and upon her feet, soundlessly, as soon as it vanished.

Slipping across the room to the doorway she threw on a dressing gown and picked up the revolver lying upon

the table. Then she quietly unlocked the cabin door and crouched, eyes upon the porthole, and waited.

She had only a moment to wait. The black silhouette moved, and a slender rod of metal slid through the hole in the center of the screen. To it was attached a larger cylinder—a silencer.

The barrel of the gun with the silencer attached came slowly through the hole and pointed directly at the place where, but a moment before, she had been lying. Smiling grimly to herself Vivian Legrand picked up her own gun and cautiously eased the cabin door open, her eyes fastened upon that black silhouette at the porthole.

Then six sharp daggers of orange flame stabbed the darkness, and the sharp, acrid smell of burned powder invaded the cabin. The reports made no more noise than the clapping of hands together. A score of feet away the sound would have been inaudible, mingled with the noises of the ship and the wash of waves against the hull.

Scarcely had the last of the daggers of flame pierced the darkness of the cabin when Vivian Legrand threw open the door, ran down the short corridor, and onto the deck. A tall, slender man was just turning the corner of the deckhouse aft, the pistol still in his hand. Throwing a glance to right and left, Vivian began to run, her bare feet padding on the damp planking. At the corner of the deckhouse she paused a moment. A few yards away a companionway light illuminated a door. Into this the man dived. When Vivian Legrand reached the opening he was nowhere in sight. He had disappeared into one of the cabins that lined the corridor, or had vanished down one of the corridors that branched off. Useless to look further.

She felt convinced that it was the same man she had encountered on deck earlier in the evening, but to identify him would be impossible. There was nothing characteristic about his walk, and the description "tall and slim" might apply to any of a dozen men on board.

III

VIVIAN LEGRAND made an early appearance in the shabby little dining saloon of the steamer the next morning. The ship was ploughing through a calm sea and it was more than probable that all of the passengers aboard would put in an appearance.

Although supposedly strangers to each other, Adrian Wylie and Vivian occupied the same table through Wylie's maneuvers with the table steward. Tall, lean and impressive ,Wylie gave far more the impression of a man of affairs, a banker, perhaps; than the whimsical, yet prudent and incalculably gifted criminal that he was.

The two sat there at their table, talking casually as steamer acquaintances will, but shrewdly sizing up every passenger who entered the saloon.

It was the two men and the woman at a table across the room who held Vivian's eyes longest. The girl was not particularly striking. She was probably French, and pretty in a superficial way. The younger of the two men Vivian Legrand had seen on deck several times since the ship sailed, and his appearance now struck a chord in her memory.

His name, she had learned, was Jacob Arbajian.

His companion was Vedova Bey, a Levantine turned Moslem to further his career. Vivian Legrand was not an impressionable woman. She had lived much and swiftly among many kinds of people, and it took something remarkable in the way of a man to sur-

prise her. At first sight of Vedova Bey she had nicknamed him the Levantine Monster.

It was not the size of the man that had prompted the nickname, and neither was it the terrible physical power which surrounded him like an aura. It was the calm, ghastly brutality with which he fairly reeked, the complete brutality of an animal, dominated by a human intelligence far above the average. Levantine Monster fitted him well.

On first seeing him on board Wylie had made discreet inquiries and had learned a little of the history of Vedova Bey. With his notorious brother (who was later hanged by the Germans during the war as a spy) he did a brisk trade in girls in Turkey.

There, prior to the World War, it was not unusual for parents to sell their daughters into the harems of wealthy men. Not always were the girls sold by their parents, either. There was many a girl who vanished from villages in France or Italy who later showed up as a slave girl in a Turkish harem.

Of his companion she knew nothing, save that he was traveling in company with Vedova Bey. What she suspected, however, was that he was the bodyguard of the Levantine Monster.

She had almost finished her breakfast when Jacob Arbajian, the Monster's companion, caught sight of her for the first time. His face went white and he stared at her as though he were gazing at a ghost. He leaned across the table and spoke to Vedova Bey. An angry scowl crossed the latter's face as he shot a swift look at Vivian.

Satisfied, she finished her breakfast. Later she went on deck. These two, the foppish young man and the Levantine Monster, were the only ones who seemed plausible suspects, and the fright of the younger of the two on seeing her added confirmation to her belief. Already her agile mind was working out a plan whereby she might prove the correctness of her theories.

DUSK was falling over Naples when Vedova Bey and his companion disembarked from the tender at the wharf and hailed a taxi. Neither of them noted the two shadows

DOC WYLIE

that detached themselves from the shadow of a building and stealthily moved in their wake—two shadows that had been watching and waiting for their appearance for more than an hour.

And if they had noticed the shadows, neither of the two men would have recognized in them Vivian Legrand and Adrian Wylie. Vivian's flaming hair was hidden beneath a black wig, drawn back and curled over the ears. Her skirt had a pleated flare and her black silk stockings glistened. She gave the impression of a parlor maid who had just doffed her lace cap and lacy apron for

a night out. A deft line or two of make-up about the eyes, a change in the curve of the eyebrows, had altogether altered the contour of her face.

Wylie was no longer the debonair, suave, well-dressed gentleman. His graying hair had been darkened with a temporary preparation. A cap was pulled down over one eye. A sweater and a pair of old trousers completed the transformation that was as complete as that of Vivian.

Keeping a cautious distance from the pair they trailed, the taxi occupied by Vivian and Wylie wandered halfway across Naples, it seemed, before turning into a black little street. Just ahead of them the other car was drawn up before a building where light gleamed through a door of painted green glass. As they watched, Vedova Bey and Joseph Arbajian passed through the door.

Waiting a few moments, Vivian and Wylie followed. The ceiling of the room they entered was low, the room narrow and not well lighted. The walls were askew, as if the house, growing old, had decided to fall down, but on second thought decided to wait awhile. One or two of the patrons looked up indifferently. There was no sign of the two men they had been following.

A man with a big mustache, dark eyes, pale face and short, stout body came on a trot to make them welcome.

Wylie asked for a private room.

The man's hands went up in a gesture of disappointment. There was only one private room and that had been engaged, not five minutes before. But he would give them a table in a corner where they would be secluded. He pointed to a table in a little alcove near the door.

Wylie shook his head and indicated a table at the far end of the long room—a table only a few feet from the door where the proprietor had emerged—most likely the private room that held the two men they sought.

For nearly fifteen minutes they sat, talking in low tones, giving a perfect impersonation of what they were supposed to be.

Vivian faced the doorway. At last she stiffened and broke off in the midst of a sentence. Her glance, with startled intensity, struck on Wylie's face.

"Camilla," she breathed through half-closed lips. Her eyes were hard, as emeralds are hard, as she furtively watched the girl.

IV

CAMILLA came into the room with an assurance that betokened familiarity with it, and the greeting of the proprietor gave evidence that she was known to him. A single word passed between them, and then Camilla made straight for the door beside Vivian and Wylie. Her glance swept them indifferently as she passed, but there was no recognition in it as she opened the door and went in.

Wylie looked up, a wordless question in his eyes. A furtive gesture of Vivian's hand bade him wait. For a moment or two they sat there until the stout proprietor passed out of the room into the kitchen in the rear. Then, with a swift movement, Vivian Legrand was on her feet. Noiselessly she opened the door and slipped through, followed by Wylie. So swift, so noiseless were their movements that none of the other patrons of the place had noted what they were doing.

They found themselves in a narrow corridor which ended in a curtain-masked doorway at the far end. Light filtered around its edges, and from behind came the voice of Camilla,

mingled with that of Vedova Bey.

The two spies crept to the curtain on noiseless feet and peered through. The thre were seated around a table, and with them was a fourth person, Raoul Valente, Monte Carlo underworld leader, his right hand still bandaged.

"You are late," Vedova Bey was saying to Camilla.

"I know," the woman answered. "Did you get the money?"

"Not yet," Vedova Bey told her. "We will get it between Naples and Constantinople, and you shall have your share in Constantinople."

Camilla's evilly passionate eyes were suspicious as she fixed them on the Levantine Monster.

"Have you tried?" she queried.

Vedova Bey nodded. "Tried—and failed. But there will be no failure next time."

"But I do not understand how you could fail," Raoul Valente put in.

"Jacob was a fool last night," snarled Vedova Bey, his yellowish, cat-like eyes gleaming. "If he had been more careful the money would be in our hands now. Three attempts, and all three failures."

"It was not my fault," protested Jacob. "The first time was too public, too dangerous. You said yourself that it must be done without the knowledge of anyone. Then, I could not know that she would not drink the poisoned water. Not my fault. And the third time you could have done no more yourself. The woman was in her berth. I fired six shots at her. Is it my fault if she is a witch woman bullets cannot kill?"

"Witch?" snarled Vedova Bey. His voice spat venom as he turned to Camilla and her companion.

"The fool fired at a shadow, a fold of the bed clothes—anything except the woman. But tonight will be different. I will take charge myself, and she will be killed without a trace and her body tossed into the sea. Then we may walk ashore in Constantinople with the money in safety."

Vivian Legrand turned to Wylie and whispered hurried instructions in his ear. He nodded, but demurred

VEDOVA BEY

at leaving her there alone. She overruled him and turned back to the curtain as Wylie, after peering through a crack in the door, slipped out without being seen.

"There is bound to be a stir when she is found missing," Camilla was saying doubtfully. Even if your influence with the Turkish authorities is great enough to prevent anything more than a perfunctory inquiry, her consul will make trouble. There will be questions, a search."

The Levantine Monster chuckled. "Not for a suicide," he said. "The lady has been very disconsolate. So she leaps overboard."

"Disconsolate?" began Camilla.

"It will all be explained in the note

she leaves behind," the Monster told her. "You are not aware that the little Suzette who travels with me has other uses besides that of being beautiful? There is no handwriting she cannot imitate. The French police know that even better than I do."

A DOOR that Vivian Legrand had not previously noticed on the other side of the room opened and the stout proprietor of the tavern entered. He was obviously agitated, and she watched in silence as he made his way to Vedova Bey and whispered. Somewhere inside her that little warning bell of intuition rang a sharp alarm.

Vedova Bey turned his head slightly and smiled.

"*Won't you come out and join us, there behind the curtain?*" he said smoothly. "You might as well, since the other end of the passage is guarded."

The man's words seemed to hang there in the air while the eyes of the four in the room converged on the curtains behind which Vivian Legrand lurked.

The shock of being discovered for a moment took her breath away. She wheeled to look behind her. The door which Wylie had closed when he left was slightly ajar, and silhouetted in the opening she could see the figure of a man with a gun.

She was in a trap, and a desperate one.

Hardly more than ten seconds had passed before she thrust the curtains aside and stepped into the room. With a cool smile on her lips she approached the table. Close to it she halted, her narrowed eyes flitting to each of them in turn.

Vedova Bey peered at her intently, with outthrust head. His yellow eyes were unwinking. Vivian Legrand met their stare steadily and calmly. Her brain was clicking with machinelike precision. Five of them to deal with, one in the passage behind her, and no telling how many cutthroats in the tavern outside. And there were six cartridges in the gun in the hand concealed by the folds of her wide skirt. In that she had the advantage. They did not know she was armed.

"And to what do I owe the pleasure of this—visit?" Vedova Bey inquired with sinister menace.

"You smiled at me out there," Vivian Legrand said. She nodded her head toward the other room. She was gay. Her eyes were sparkling, her mouth quirked in a mocking smile. "You did not come back—so I came in."

She took a step forward. Sharp apprehension flashed in the deep yellow eyes, but before Vedova Bey could divine her intent, she brought the butt of her gun down in a smashing blow upon his temple. It was a terrific blow, and he dropped almost as if he were dead.

A cry went up from Camilla—a cry like the merciless "Au-rr-ugh" of a wolf calling the pack to the kill.

Even as Vivian Legrand straightened up from the blow a thrown knife grazed her shoulder. She realized that Valente, now on his feet, could throw a knife with his left hand almost as well as with his right. A quick glance over her shoulder showed her the fifth man, his mouth open in astonishment, just pushing aside the curtains that masked the doorway through which she had come.

Valente was the only one who had made a move toward her. The others seemed, somehow, to think themselves unfairly tricked by seeing a gun in the

hand of a woman they had thought unarmed.

Before they could recover from their astonishment, Vivian Legrand spun about and her gun spat flame at the man in the doorway. He dropped, and without pausing to see whether he actually was out of the fight or not, she wheeled around and put a bullet into Valente—who, too late, was attempting to rush her.

Long in the telling but short in the doing. Almost before Valente's body had crumpled to the floor and while Camilla's scream was still hanging in the air, Vivian Legrand was at the curtain-masked d o o r w a y through which she had entered, was down the passage and in the tavern itself. It was empty.

As she opened the door there was the noiseless tiptoe of a foot and the door to the kitchen opened. The stout proprietor peered into the long room.

He gave Vivian Legrand one long stare, caught sight of the gun in her hand, turned with a yell of fright and bolted. A moment later there was the sound of a heavy object being pushed against the door. Silence followed, silence so complete and abrupt as to give the uneasy sensation that the sound had been only a fantastic trick of the mind.

V

VIVIAN LEGRAND did not stop. At any moment Jacob or Camilla might burst out of the passage behind her with spitting gun. She wasted no thoughts upon the two men she had shot down. That was like her.

So now she fled down the long, empty room, jerked open the door and found herself in the dark street. At the corner a taxi waited, with the driver asleep on the seat. He woke to the prod of her gun and in another moment the car was bumping over the cobbled street.

A block from her destination she stopped the taxi and got out. It was a dark little side street, with an uneven narrow sidewalk and cobbled street. In the shadowy alcove of a huddle of buildings she found Wylie waiting as arranged.

Swiftly she gave him a résumé of what had happened, and then asked a single question herself:

"Is it arranged?"

Wylie nodded. "No trouble at all. We deliver the goods and collect the cash."

There was little said after this. Vivian was keenly aware of the difficulty of the thing she had set out to do. Her brain was working coolly, methodically; and in her half-closed eyes was something more deadly and remorseless than is ordinarily found in the eyes of any woman.

Camilla Tomasino would fight her, would she? Fight Vivian Legrand? All right. But she would fight back. And Camilla, if she lived long enough to regret it, would rue to her last day the impulse that made her fight.

Cloaked in the shadows Vivian and Wylie waited until a car drove up and Camilla disembarked. Vivian did not move, but her hand tightened on Wylie's arm.

The car drove off and she whispered a single terse word to Wylie. With swift, noiseless tread he was at the side of the black-haired girl. Before Camilla could utter a word his arm had tightened about her neck and Vivian Legrand had pressed a handkerchief, soaked in chloroform, to her mouth and nostrils.

A few moments more and a man and a woman, supporting between them

the limp form of a woman who had evidently had too much liquor, made their way down the street. Fifteen minutes more and the taxi they had picked up deposited Vivian, Wylie and their limp burden before a tumble-down shack at the corner of a smelly alley. An old woman opened the door at their knock, a woman whose gray, lank hair fell about her face.

The old woman looked at Camilla's still white face in the yellow rays of the lamp on the table and nodded her head.

"She will do," she croaked. "One thousand liras, you say?"

"Five thousand," Vivian snapped.

"I can never get that for her," whined the old woman. "Girls are cheap now."

"Not this kind," Vivian Legrand retorted calmly.

"Aï," whined the old woman, "but you are hard! However, there is a man in Salonica who wants just such a one as she—Gregor Vedova, with whom I have done business in the past. I will be hard with him as you are with me."

Irony lurked in the depths of Vivian Legrand's greenish eyes as the old woman pulled a roll of bills from beneath her filthy dress and began to count them out. It appealed to her sense of humor that Camilla should be sold to the brother of Vedova Bey, the Levantine Monster.

"There," the old woman said as she paid over the last bill. "You have your five thousand. And if you ever have another like her, Old Mother Salina will take her off your hands. But not at this price. Not at this price!"

She was still cackling and rubbing her hands when Vivian and Wylie closed the door and stepped into the street again.

"I think," Vivian Legrand said calmly, as they started for the ship, "that Camilla will regret for a very long time that she did not remain in Monte Carlo and mind her own business."

THEY boarded the ship separately, and her face was thoughtful as she hurriedly removed her disguise. The affair was not ended by any means.

Discreet inquiries of her room steward had elicited the information that Vedova Bey and Jacob had come aboard more than an hour before. Vedova Bey had been in an accident, the man informed her, and was wearing a bandage upon his head. Vivian Legrand smiled grimly at the information. The man was lucky that he was not lying in his coffin.

She was still thoughtful when she met Wylie a few minutes later. They were passing the purser's office when that worthy himself called to her:

"I am desolated, Madame Legrand, to have been absent this afternoon," he told her, "but my assistant conveyed your message to me. You may be quite sure that we shall say nothing of you having withdrawn your valuables. But are you sure, *madame,* that it is quite safe?"

Vivian stared at him incredulously for a moment. This was the one thing her agile brain had not expected, had not prepared for. And then into her mind flashed a sentence that the Levantine Monster had uttered an hour or so before:

"The little Suzette has other uses besides being beautiful. There is no handwriting she cannot imitate . . ."

A flash of inward lightning seemed to quiver across her face.

"You still have my receipt?" she asked abruptly, and at the purser's, "But, of course, *madame!*" she went on.

"Would you permit me to see it? I am not quite sure that I signed it as I did my deposit slip, and I should like the transaction to be quite in order, of course."

"It is the same, *madame*," he assured her, as he opened a drawer in the safe and took out a printed form. "Had it not been the same you would not have obtained the envelope with your valuables, even though we knew you to be the owner."

Vivian Legrand glanced at the slip he laid before her. For a moment Wylie's eyes were caught by a glinting stare. Those green eyes seemed to flame with an emotion which did not appear on the carved ivory mask of the face. The signature *was* the same. It was one of the most beautiful forgeries she had ever seen.

Every nerve in her body was tense with the effort of maintaining a careless smile as she handed the slip of paper back to the purser.

"It is the same," she said quietly.

So that was why her room had been searched. They were clever, this Levantine Monster and his gunman. They had found the purser's deposit slip in its hiding place, the girl had copied it, and then it had been cunningly replaced so that her suspicions might not be aroused.

Then the girl, disguising herself to look as much as possible like Vivian, had presented a forged deposit slip and received the envelope containing her jewels and nearly a million francs in currency.

That was why the girl had studied her so steadily that morning at breakfast . . . why, all through the day she had found the girl watching her furtively on deck . . .

They planned now to kill her and to walk off the ship in complete possession of the money and the situation.

Vivian Legrand smiled grimly. That was their plan. But she had another.

VI

WITH a furtive look to make sure that she was not observed, Vivian Legrand closed the door of the Levantine Monster's cabin behind her and stepped into the corridor. Her search had been thorough. Secure in the knowledge that neither Vedova Bey or his pretty companion would leave the deck, where Wylie was entertaining them, she had ransacked every available hiding place. Her missing money was not in the cabin.

She had not expected the money to be so casually hidden that she would stumble over it immediately, but neither had she expected the man to take extraordinary precautions in hiding it. She knew that they were counting on her not learning that the money had been withdrawn on a forged receipt, and of there being no search made for it.

Noiselessly she slipped down the corridor to Cabin 51, occupied by Jacob. She knew that he had retired an hour or more before, and the fact that the room was in darkness would seem to indicate that he was asleep. She listened carefully at the door. The man was asleep. His deep, regular breathing was clearly audible.

Entering quietly with a skeleton key she found that sufficient light came through the porthole to make her electric torch unnecessary. Then she slid over to the berth and listened again. There was no doubt of it. The man was sound asleep.

Carefully she placed the peculiar weapon she carried on the edge of the wash basin—a weapon that seemed harmless enough and yet was, as she

knew, much more effective than a gun in a situation where the sound of a gun would be fatal. It was something her fertile brain had devised, and was, in later years, to become part of the equipment of every member of the Legrand gang when on an errand like this.

Then she set to work. Every bit of baggage was gone through. Every space that could have possibly held the money and her jewels was ransacked. But without success.

And then her eyes lit on the one place that she had not searched. Noiselessly she crossed the cabin to it.

The steamer, like most of the prewar vessels in the Turkish trade, was not equipped with running water. Instead, each cabin had a small tank which was supposed to be kept filled by the steward.

Lifting the top of this white enameled tank, Vivian Legrand plunged her hand into it. A smile of triumph illuminated her face as she brought up a dripping package wrapped in oilskin.

And then tragedy swept upon her with sinister swiftness.

An intuition, a sudden leaping of her nerves from no visible warning, saved her. She leaped sidewise under this intuitive impulse as the extended hand of the man behind her aimed a blow at her head with a revolver held clubwise. And at almost the same instant she struck with the edge of her hand on the man's wrist, a short chopping blow that sent the gun spinning into the corner of the room.

Jacob Arbajian flashed on the light, and for a moment the two, the killer and the woman, stood there staring at one another.

Jacob was between Vivian and the door, and his eyes were fixed on her with a dancing alertness as he backed slowly, a step at a time, toward the corner where his gun had fallen.

For once, Vivian Legrand was not armed with a gun. True, she had that strange weapon, but it lay on the edge of the washbasin where she had left it to reach for the oilskin package. She could not reach it in a single backward leap, but she dared not make that leap, because that single instant of time would give the man the opportunity to leap for his own gun.

Not a word was spoken by either. Slowly, so slowly as to be almost imperceptible, Vivian Legrand backed toward the washbasin where her own weapon lay, and slowly the man inched toward his own gun on the floor.

Then he flung himself forward, snatched it up. His finger was just curving on the trigger when some sixth sense caused him to glance at her right hand.

"Put your hand down!" he screamed. "I'll shoot. I'll—"

He broke off with a horrible, high-pitched, choking noise. He stumbled back and crashed to the floor, clawing frantically at his eyes.

"Oh, my God!" he moaned. "I'm blind! My eyes! You've put them out. I can't see!"

His lips slobbered. He kicked and writhed on the floor. Concentrated ammonia does that. It burns the eyes and scorches and strangles. Renders a man immediately helpless.

Vivian Legrand's weapon had been a small rubber syringe filled with the stuff, and she had squirted a fine spray full into the man's face. She dropped the syringe back into the washbasin and started toward the door.

Almost simultaneously there was the muffled sound of a shot from the porthole, barely distinguishable a dozen feet away because of the fact

that the gun from which it came bore a silencer.

Jacob crumpled to the floor, a gaping hole in his forehead. Almost instantly Vivian Legrand threw herself to one side. Her hand found the light switch, plunged the room in darkness. Then, keeping out of the light that streamed through the porthole, she crept across the cabin and flung open the door.

Standing outside, blocking her passage, was Vedova Bey, the Levantine Monster.

WITH a quick gesture he thrust her back into the room, stepped inside and closed the door behind him. A quick turn of his wrist and the door was locked and the key in his pocket.

"I was a fool this afternoon," the man said. "I should have realized that a woman clever enough to have worked that trick in Monte Carlo would be clever enough to fit two and two together and get to the bottom of Jacob's rather clumsy attempts upon your life. But when you shot your way out of that trap this afternoon it did not occur to me that it might be you."

"Jacob," Vivian Legrand said with deadly calm, "seems to have paid for his carelessness."

"I do not regret having to shoot him," the Levantine Monster said with an indifferent glance at the still form on the floor. "He deserved it."

"Now," went on Vedova Bey, his eyes again fixed upon her, "if you will be so kind as to give me the little package you have there you may go."

Fire flashed instantly into Vivian's greenish eyes. She struck out swiftly and boldly.

"Do you realize," she told him, with just the right amount of calm insolence in her voice, "that you have just murdered a man? Even though this be technically Turkish soil, there will be inquiries."

"I murder my friend—my very dear friend and companion?

"Do you think, my dear Madame Legrand, that I intend to take the blame for a murder that you committed? No. Most assuredly not. You had a rendezvous with my companion. You quarreled. You shot him. And now I, out of the goodness of my heart, am offering you an opportunity to escape before the crime is discovered. Will you give me the bag, now?" he added, apparently as an afterthought.

Instead he found himself staring into the muzzle of the revolver Jacob had dropped when he fell to the floor.

"If you will be so kind as to step aside," Vivian Legrand suggested, "you will live a great deal longer than if you compel me to shoot." Her voice came low, steady with threat. "The authorities might be interested in knowing that I was passing. I heard a shot. I flung open the door and found you standing over your victim, the smoking revolver in your hand."

The Levantine Monster shook his head. There was a light in his eyes that

warned her that he had not played his last card.

"That was clever," he said, and his slight smile deepened into a sneer. "It took an exceedingly agile brain to think of that on the spur of the moment. But, unfortunately, I had anticipated something of the sort. For that reason, I stationed my little Suzette in the hallway. We were together, Suzette and I, we heard the shot. I flung open the door and found *you* standing over your victim." He shot a glance at Vivian Legrand. "Ah, you do not believe." He raised his voice and called.

"I am here," came the voice of a woman from beyond the door panel.

"Now will you give me the bag?"

"I will not," Vivian Legrand said.

"IF you will hand the bag to me," said Wylie's voice at the porthole, "that will end the matter."

The slim and menacing muzzle of a revolver peered through the porthole, covering Vedova Bey.

"I witnessed the whole thing," came Wylie's calm voice. "It was most fortunate that I was on deck, just outside the cabin, and heard and witnessed the whole thing through the porthole. You, *madame,* if you will hand me the bag, I will deposit it with the purser for you."

Vedova Bey had stepped back involuntarily against the door jamb as Wylie first spoke. He leaned there, anger flaring in his eyes as Vivian Legrand swiftly crossed the cabin and handed the bag to Wylie through the porthole. He tried vainly to catch one glimpse of the face of the man to whom she handed it, but the darkness outside baffled him.

"You do not realize," he said slowly, "that I am powerful in Constantinople. That my power is great. You will surely be sent to prison unless you deal with me. You have committed a murder. I am a witness against you. No one will believe that I, Vedova Bey, would murder my companion."

"Beat it," Vivian told him, anger rising in her like a tide. Forgotten was the fact that her position in a court of law would be a dubious one. Forgotten was the fact that it would be futile to appeal to a consul for aid.

She walked determinedly toward the door.

But Vedova Bey did not move. He still stood there at the doorway, blocking her progress.

"I do not think it will be necessary for me to tell anything," he said softly. "While we have been talking, I have been leaning against the call bell, pressing it with my shoulder. Listen."

She did. There was the sound of voices in the corridor.

"The steward—the night watchman," explained the Levantine Monster. "The constant ringing of the bell has brought them."

A hammering sounded on the door, a shouted command to open.

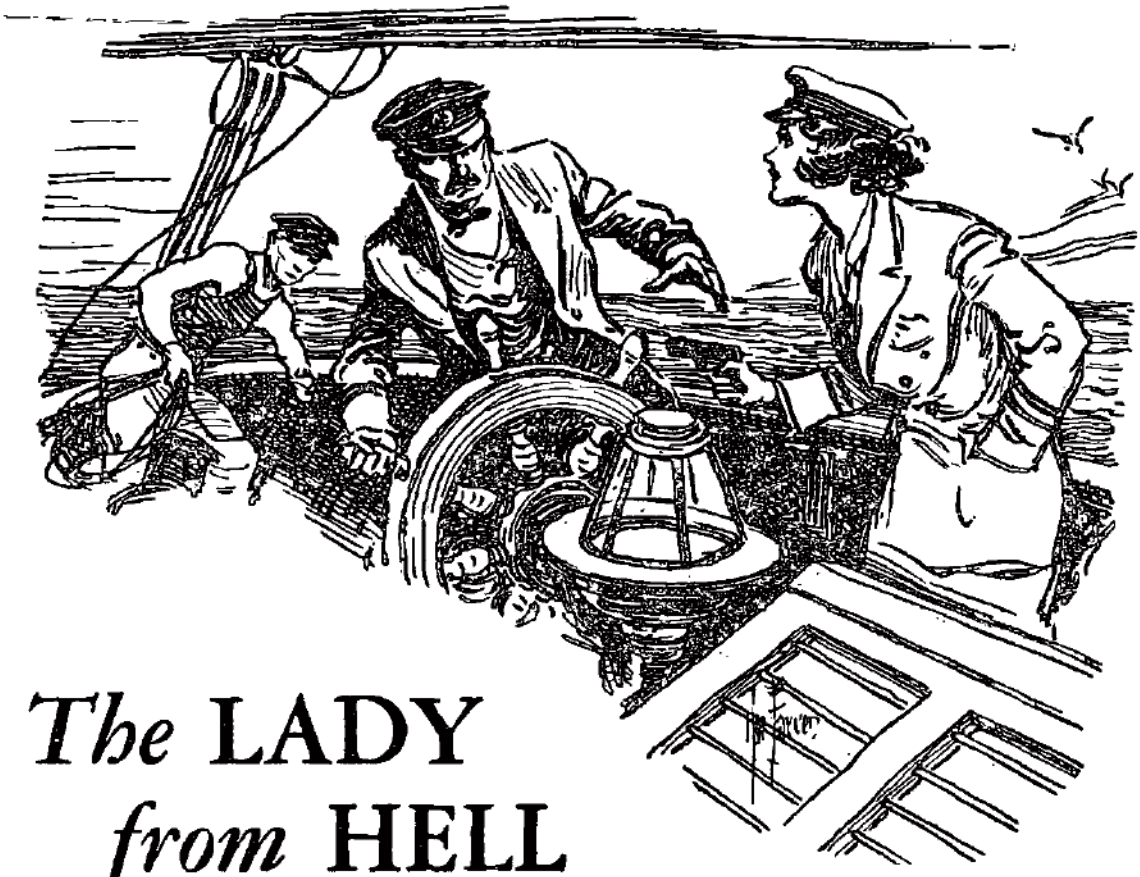
"Turkish prisons are not pleasant places," said the Levantine Monster, as he took the key from his pocket and prepared to fit it into the door. "Perhaps after the experience of a few days in one of them you may decide to talk to me. I have great authority in Constantinople."

He turned the key in the lock.

"I may go to prison," Vivian Legrand told him grimly, "but I won't stay there. And I won't buy my way out by paying you, either."

Vedova Bey bowed with a smile, threw open the door.

"Summon the captain," he said curtly to the men on the threshold. "A murder has been committed."



The LADY *from* HELL

Vivian Legrand lifted the gun

The Adventure of the Cayenne Fugitives

A True Story by

Eugene Thomas

They Were Five Desperate Men in an Open Boat Drifting across the Tropic Sea—into the Clutches of the Arch-Villainess, Vivian Legrand

CHAPTER I

The Dangerous Fugitive

THE Lady from Hell wasn't looking for trouble, and did not guess that she was finding it. She swept the horizon with powerful binoculars, focussing momentarily on a distant, as yet indistinguishable speck on the water and then continued to gaze until she had described a casual arc. Her eyes, as they came to rest again on Adrian Wylie, seated in the stern of the boat, were thoughtful.

"Today," she said, "is the fourteenth."

Wylie was fishing. He glanced up with a smile.

"And tomorrow," he observed, "will be the fifteenth."

Vivian Legrand did not smile. "Things happen to me on the fourteenth," she said seriously. "It was the fourteenth of September when I walked into that house on the Plaza Goiti in Manila—the house of the

Mandarin Hoang Fi Tu—and met you for the first time. It was the fourteenth when I first met Sir Mark Caywood in Burma. It was the fourteenth when we first collided with Vedova Bey—"

She raised her binoculars again, watching the distant, blurred speck bobbing upon the sea which was moving with a leaden, sultry calm in which there seemed a lifeless and sinister oppression. Wylie watched her, his own face thoughtful. Although she was in the shadow of the awning overhead, an aura of brilliance from the shimmering sea silhouetted her delicate, exotic face; her curved red lips, the wind-stirred crest of her red hair.

He had a great deal of respect for the intuitive powers of this forceful woman who had been the guiding genius in all of their criminal activities, and it was quite evident that something was troubling her now. A scent of trouble. It hung in the heavy, overheated air. It seemed to breathe an uncertainty into her actions. It was nothing—but he could see that it had infected her with an unnatural tension, a psychic awareness of impending evil.

Vivian Legrand, whom the underworld of three continents had nicknamed The Lady from Hell because of her daring exploits, was on a vacation from her career of crime. With Adrian Wylie, her chief of staff and companion in all her schemes, she had sailed from London. Havana, through chance, had brought a considerable amount of money to swell the bank account of the two criminals, and in Port au Prince a week before the two had blackmailed a planter of his sugar plantation and resold it to the sugar trust. Now, they were cruising among the lower islands on a yacht they had chartered.

"Is it just the fact that today is the fourteenth, Vivian," Wylie queried, "or is there something else in the wind?"

She shrugged and raised her glasses again.

"I don't know," she confessed.

Her glasses were riveted now on that queer horizon dot, which had gradually come within range of her strong lenses.

She saw a peculiar sort of boat, with a small, ragged sail. There were men in the boat—she counted three—but even as she watched one of the figures slumped down out of sight. Only two huddled forms to be seen. Then but a lone man.

The little craft had no cabin or deck and no cover of any description. The men, as she coolly studied them, appeared to be dying.

FOR seventy-two hours past the fugitives in the dugout canoe had scarcely dared to change position. They were cramped and numb and miserable. But in that time, so it seemed, they had voyaged a long, long way. From a world of concentrated horror to a world of vague despair.

They had been all but overwhelmed by two terrific thunderstorms. They had skirted treacherous mud banks, survived whirling currents and heat and hurricane gusts. Lately they had not dared to steer toward shore to land and forage and obtain fresh water, because of suspected pursuit and quicksands as well as habitations known to be hostile. Sailing onward almost helplessly, without prayer or a compass, they had come to the final hazards of the surging tropic sea. They were becalmed.

The wind which had braced them and swept them madly along had died down to a fitful breeze, capricious as

their own turbulent destiny. It flirted with them for a while, puffed them ahead, then retarded them, winning the applause or bracing the abuse of criminals condemned for life and fluently profane in five languages.

Waves slapped the sides of their clumsy little craft, drenching them with spray. When they had to bail they used the tin food basins which were not so much dread reminders of the prison from which they fled as painful reminders of their own overmastering hunger and thirst. The water jars empty half a day! The last of the fruit and frugal supplies eaten hours ago!

They were feverish with longing for drink, for food and unstirring sleep. They were sick with anxiety, tortured by hope, feeble from days of fugitive ordeal.

The canoe that held them was a roughly carpentered log some eighteen feet in length, with strips of *moca-moca*—a much lighter wood, buoyant as cork—lashed on either side. There was a crudely improvised rudder and keel to it, and a stumpy mast with a draggled, lateen-rigged sail. And in this curious blend of coffin and argosy they tossed beneath a blistering sun.

There were five men in the boat, one of whom was bound and gagged in the bow. The four escapers looked much alike; scorched, bearded, cruelly emaciated. And they were equally uniform in their fierce resolve to get beyond the reach of French law. They wore grimy white blouses and cotton trousers. On their backs were stenciled numbers. Three of them had wide-crowned, flat-brimmed limp straw hats. The fourth had his head bandaged with a piece of cotton cloth, soiled and stained with blood.

The man aft, who steered and seemed the least inert, was Tristan Malliard, a notorious murderer.

Suddenly he raised a sun cracked hand.

"There," he croaked. "Land! Land!"

"Again?" One of them spoke as the others strained bloodshot eyes to see the dim line at which Malliard was pointing. "Not Surinam or Demerara?"

There was no relief awaiting them in Dutch or British Guiana. Fugitives from Cayenne were taken in those neighboring colonies by whites and blacks alike—returned to the convict cantonments at two hundred francs a head.

"Trinidad, I think—or perhaps Tobago," Malliard responded. "We're far off the mainland. A low flat coast, Courelle always described it. And he should know. They dragged him back from Trinidad."

"But Tristan," one of the others said slowly, "the English, they were different there today."

"Yes," their leader responded. "We will be safe there—if they have not heard of the escape."

"But what about him?"

Lerulot, anarchist and would-be assassin of a premier of France, pointed to the tumbled heap of rags, sail cloth and rope which covered their prisoner.

Most Cayenne prison breaks are furtive affairs in which the convicts await an unguarded moment and steal away from one of the labor camps, making for a river or a jungle retreat. But Malliard and his comrades, originally seven in number, made their dash for freedom as part of a minor convict uprising. Two warders and a convict had been killed. The shrewd leadership of Malliard had directed that they protect their flight, if possible, with a

hostage. And largely by chance they had been able to seize the man they hated most.

The reputation of Pedro de Martinque is still seared in the minds of decent residents of French Guiana. No convict, young or old, who had the misfortune to have him as a warder, ever forgets what terror he was able to inspire in the bravest convict. His name was really not Martinque. It was Pedro de Gorot. But, because he had come from Martinque, where his brother lived, he had been given the nickname by the convicts.

Now bound and helpless, gagged most of the time, until his lips and tongue had become so swollen that it did not matter, this hated chief warder of the road building camp whence Malliard and the others had fled, lay in the bow of the boat, blistered, practically insensible—and yet refusing to die.

So long as they feared pursuers overtaking them, the fugitives counted upon the presence of their captive to save them from being killed upon the spot—their canoe riddled by rifle fire and allowed to sink under them in a shark-infested sea! But now land, distinctly visible, made the situation different.

PEDRO DE MARTINQUE, as a hostage or a corpse, was a dangerous liability. He must be tossed overboard.

Urged on by the vindictive Lerulot, they tried to lift him and dump him over the side. But they had all become too weak. Groaning, cursing and heaving, they nearly capsized their craft. It was no use.

Pedro hung about their necks like a millstone. When they could afford to abandon the canoe, they might dispose of him—but not before.

The exertions of their attempt only weakened them all the more. And the rough handling given the man seemed to revive him. He looked up at them for a moment, and it seemed that his glance was mocking. Actually he was too close to madness to have any rational thought. But he had mocked and tormented them so often. Lerulot, cursing, struck the warder feebly.

There was still that sultry calm, and the canoe was making no headway under a sky into which a faint yellow glaze had crept; a glaze that was almost the color of sulphur. Yet with land in sight, inspiring their hopes again, the four convicts decided to paddle toward the haven. And here again strength failed them.

In bitter realization of their exhausted state they had just stopped paddling when Vivian Legrand first saw their craft.

Dropping her glasses, Vivian gave a swift curt order to the master of the *Esmeralda*. Wylie looked up quickly, then got to his feet and came to her side. He gazed long through her glasses and then turned to her.

"Better be careful, Vivian, there's something queer about that boat."

"I know," she responded. "But this is the fourteenth!"

"There's no profit in a canoe filled with dead or dying men," he argued. "It's obviously not a ship's boat. No chance of it being the millionaire owner of a wrecked yacht."

She raised her glasses again. The *Esmeralda* was close enough now to the dugout canoe for her to see clearly the slack forms of its castaway crew.

She gave a little exclamation. "They are escaped convicts, Doc," she said. "Probably from Cayenne. The one on the bow has a number stenciled on the back of his blouse. There is profit

in convicts," she added, her tone reminiscent. "There was profit in Stavinsky, you remember."

"Stavinsky was a secret service man whom we rescued from a penal colony," Wylie reminded her. "I don't like the smell of this." There was uneasiness in his voice.

"I always like the smell of profits," The Lady from Hell said crisply. "Besides, don't forget it's the fourteenth."

She turned to issue sharp orders to Matteo and his sons, who manned the *Esmeralda.* In a few minutes five limp forms were lifted from the wallowing canoe and laid beneath the awning on the after deck. The canoe was turned adrift again.

Wylie, assisted by Matteo, worked over the five they had curiously rescued. It was Tristan Malliard who first opened his eyes, tried to sit up and could not. Only by terrific exertion of will was he able to force a few words through swollen lips.

"Water," was the only word they could distinguish.

Pedro de Martinque revived next. But there were only his bloodshot eyes to report upon his flickering consciousness. His tongue and lips were too swollen to permit an articulate sound.

LATER in the day the five had partially recovered. Malliard and Brune were quiet, seemingly content to enjoy whatever brief blessings of fortune came their way. Their comrade, Despard, was weak and ill, having less than a fifty-fifty chance, Wylie said, to pull through. Lerulot, perhaps because he had been most intellectually active, was quite out of his head. The sun had boiled that fiery and fanatic brain to a tempest of delirium. Wylie improvised a straitjacket of rope and canvas.

Pedro de Martinque lay silent, watchful, apparently wondering to find himself still among the living.

Lerulot grew calmer, and by pleading murmurs and rolling of the eyes, implored them to release him from his bonds.

"Go ahead—let him loose. He's had shackles enough in his time," Vivian said.

"But the delirium will return," Wylie protested.

"Take a chance on that," she said.

Of course it did return just at dusk. Raving and gesticulating, the man who had fixed his mind on escape from Cayenne madly struggled with Matteo and one of his sons, easily brushed Wylie aside, leaped to the rail and plunged overboard with a hideous yell.

Matteo signalled to come about with the yacht, which was cruising at only five knots, using her engine. There was no wind for the sails, and the sea was long, oily rollers that seemed to have taken on something of the yellow tint of the sky.

"Who is he, that delirious one?" Vivian bent over Tristan Malliard to ask in French.

"Andre Lerulot, the great anarchist. A lifer at Cayenne. He shot and badly wounded Premier Phillippe—"

"The man is a fool. It is good riddance," she turned and crisply shouted an order to Matteo.

"But he is swimming—I can see him plainly, *Señora* Legrand," protested the master of the yacht. "A sudden plunge into the water has cleared his head. We can put about and pick him up with ease in this light—"

"Let him swim." Her voice held the ring of steel.

"But *Señora,* I cannot," Matteo protested. "It would be murder." He

turned and shouted an order to one of his sons.

"I wouldn't, Matteo," The Lady from Hell said smoothly. Something in her tone made him turn to glance at her. The tiny but deadly little gun that she was rarely without had appeared in her hand as if from the empty air, and was covering him. "If your son tosses Lerulot a rope . . ." she said significantly, and lifted the gun just the slightest fraction.

The man stared at her. "You wish him to die?" he queried slowly.

"He has chosen," The Lady from Hell said crisply. "Let him swim. If he reaches land, so much the better for him."

"Yes, *Señora,*" Matteo said. He turned away with a helpless shrug and shot a swift order at his son. The coil of rope was dropped to the deck again, and the boat drew away from the struggling man.

"An anarchist," The Lady from Hell said to Wylie. There was in her manner, her voice, not the slightest shadow of the callous thing she had just done. "I want nothing to do with politics—and fanatics of his sort are especially bad. Give that Lerulot two days of good treatment on board, and we'd have had a trouble-maker to deal with."

"So you figure the others as gentle as lambs?" Wylie smiled.

"I can handle the others," Vivian assured him confidently.

CHAPTER II

A Floating Fortune

MURDER, unlike some other crimes, does not necessarily put its mark upon those who have been fated to kill a fellow being. And later that day Tristan Malliard, shaved and bathed and decently dressed, proved to be a decidedly presentable, if worn and emaciated, young man.

He had belonged to a gang responsible for the death of several French policemen. Tristan's youth had seemed to his judges a mitigating circumstance, and at sixteen he had been saved from the chopper, while being condemned to the "dry guillotine" of Guiana for the rest of his life. Tristan was now twenty-nine, with a keenness and quality of leadership that showed what first rate material had gone to waste when the slums enlisted him with the most reckless *apache* gang of Paris.

Late that afternoon, briefly and modestly, without carping affectations of reform or remorse, he told his own story. Brune, he continued, had been a robber. Despard, whose life was still in danger, had been a pal of Brune's. Their depradations in Marseilles had been a nine days' wonder. But at length the police cordon—the Assizes—and a sentence of transportation, carrying life exile from their native France.

Malliard tactfully passed over the career of the lost Andre Lerulot.

"We are, I'm afraid, unable to thank you or repay you," he went on. "Even if you choose to return us to Cayenne and collect a triple reward, we are worth 'on the hoof' precisely two hundred francs each."

"That's a lie," Pedro broke in. "Thousands of francs reward will be offered for them. If you had not let Lerulot drown, at least ten thousand would have been collected on him alone."

Vivian turned quickly to Malliard before Pedro could continue. "Tell me, why did you choose to carry Pedro alive through waters thick with hungry,

sharks? Why didn't you get rid of him?"

He told her of their ultimate attempt to rid themselves of their hostage, and how all the puny strength they could exert was not enough to tip him out without overturning the dugout canoe. He finished with:

"Pedro was chief overseer at the road building camp near Kou-Rou. His cruelties were endless. He would bury a man in sand to his chin, and let ants crawl into his mouth, ears and eyes. He was a killer only by accident. He preferred that the convicts should live to be disciplined by his tortures. He would even steal their food and clothes and sell them."

"You lie!" Pedro cried out.

Vivian stared hard at the snarling warder from Cayenne. "I believe you," she said to Malliard. Then she turned to Pedro. "Let's get this straight. You were, I understand, a thief—in league with bigger thieves. That means you know where money is hidden. You can afford to ransom yourself. You two," she turned to Malliard and Brune, "are not beaten. You are free. There's life in you. Think, consider your situation—tell me how we may turn your being pursued to account?"

"And if we can't think so quickly—if the sun has cooked what brains we ever had?" Malliard queried.

"Then, when a patrol boat sights us and hails us, perhaps I may have no ideas either. Get busy and think of some way to pay your passage, my friends, or I'll have to give you up."

Pedro smirked and quite audibly chuckled.

The Lady from Hell turned on him. "As for you—if we are chased by a patrol boat, start in praying. I know your kind of prison bully. There's no reward being posted for your return to Cayenne, I'll bet on that. And I don't think you ever will return—a dose of salt water will cure all your ailments."

THE *Esmeralda* with its ill-assorted human freight sailed on, and was now on the course of larger vessels bound to or from Brazilian ports.

Tristan Malliard approached Vivian Legrand, and spoke in an even, half-apologetic tone.

"We can think of no way of paying you," he confessed. "And you had better toss us overboard soon, Madame—the three of us—and Pedro."

"Why?" Vivian snapped.

"I'm afraid the pursuit is on," he said simply.

Vivian wheeled and stared off in the direction that he indicated. Sure enough, a distant smudge of smoke on the horizon revealed the approach of a vessel apparently traveling at full speed. The Lady from Hell brought her powerful binoculars to bear upon it, and could make out a slim, rakish white craft that might very well be a French gunboat.

She handed Malliard the glasses and watched him studying the oncoming ship. His hands were steady; his nonchalance was a quality she admired.

"I suspect we're in for it," he said. "Luck's against us—"

"It's odd they'd overlook you those days you were drifting or becalmed in that rotten log, but now find you when you get aboard this yacht."

"The answer is, Madame Legrand, your power yacht has not drifted but cut squarely across a ship lane. And the question is—what are you going to do?"

Vivian's eyes sparkled. "I'm not

going to throw a valuable cargo overboard. Whoever it is, we'll fool 'em. Call Brune."

Wylie did not object to her latest whim, for a warning beacon of fire blazed in her eyes. She was absorbed in her plot, and meant to see it through.

Matteo and his sons she cowed and suppressed. Pedro de Martinque she ordered bound and gagged, and saw to it herself that the bonds cut savagely and the gag was secure and cruel. Brune and Malliard she disguised with deft, sure strokes—one a master of the *Esmeralda,* clad in a yachting outfit borrowed from Wylie—the other a guest, with Wylie again the outfitter.

Presently all was arranged as she had planned it, and the *Esmeralda* was shipshape, ready for an encounter with the French naval craft.

Wylie trained his glass upon it. "Say—" He stared hard again, then whistled softly. "Maybe you win after all, Vi."

"What is it?" she said quickly.

"That's no French gunboat—hell, I ought to have known it first glance. Look at the slope of her stack and those rakish masts. Has wireless—everything up to date. Vi, my dear, unless there's two of them, that's the *Iroquois*—finest pleasure craft afloat, the latest toy of Myron T. Granville, magnate of steel, magnate of oil, magnate—"

Vivian had heard enough. "Stop the engine," she ordered.

"Good Lord, why? That yacht's making eighteen knots. She'll overhaul us fast enough."

"But we're in distress, Doc. Off our course—drifting—a lady in distress, small crew, one guest. Malliard—no, come to think of it, he'll have to switch to the crew with Brune. Can your wardrobe manage it?"

"If you say so, it'll have to. What'll all this make me, a tattooed man?"

"No, you'll be on your dignity. Get busy — gray hair, eyeglasses, wide black ribbon and all the rest of it. With your South'n Kunnel accent, Adrian. You're playing my father."

He consented, laughing. "And with just what object in view?" he said

"The rich, majestic Mr. Myron T. Granville."

"Suppose he's not aboard, after all this planning?"

Vivian waved the suggestion aside. "I'm playing a hunch. Myron will be aboard. Else why would that gorgeous floating mansion be churning through these waters?"

"And our being in distress," said Wylie as the *Esmeralda* lost headway and began to drift, "you think it will win us an invitation aboard the *Iroquois?* They say Granville's worth a cool hundred million. And I've heard he's susceptible to beautiful women."

She flashed him a dazzling smile.

THE splendid *Iroquois* steamed up alongside of the bobbing little *Esmeralda* with a long halyard of bright signal flags whipping in the breeze. Wylie was able to interpret the code message.

"Asks us if we need help."

"Tell him yes."

The two vessels were now close enough for a hail. Wylie, who had deftly added twenty years to his age and an austere dignity to his manner, cupped his hands and called an answer across the water.

In no time a small boat, smartly manned by four seamen in immaculate uniforms, put off from the *Iroquois.* It was a Vivian Legrand of untold enchantment and charm who presently received the florid, robust Granville.

"My daughter, suh — Mrs. Legrand," said Wylie, having introduced himself as "Colonel Mortimer Wylie." He assured the multi-millionaire that it was "an honor, suh, a great honor" to have so famous a compatriot come to their aid.

"Lucky I sighted you," Granville boomed. "My old tub"—he gestured toward the shining *Iroquois* as though he'd found it abandoned on some American inland canal—"my old tub there has wireless, just like the newest liners. And my operator picked up a call in French. Speak French like a native, myself. I translated it. And it means danger—serious danger for a boat the size of this one. The French are warning all ships to be on the lookout for a dangerous band of criminals—"

"Criminals, suh?" Wylie gasped. On the high seas!"

Vivian spoke gently. "Do you mean pirates, Mr. Granville?"

Ma'am, I mean French convicts—escaped from that hell hole"—he stopped short and apologized to The Lady from Hell—"that penal colony at Cayenne."

"They were heading this way, suh?" Wylie exclaimed with dignified dismay.

"That's just it, nobody knows where they're heading, Colonel. But they've got a boat they stole—" Vivian gasped.

Granville turned toward her, his voice softened. "Very sorry to frighten you like this, Mrs. Legrand," he said, "but it's best you folks should be on your guard. Having no wireless—"

I am not frightened, Mr. Granville," said Vivian. "Not a bit frightened while your great ship is near. It's so superb, so perfect—like a man-of-war. What could harm it?"

"Right you are," the millionaire boomed proudly. "We rode out a hurricane in the West Indies. And rather than stand here, may I not have the honor of your company at dinner? I'll send my second engineer over to you, meanwhile, and he'll have your motor going before we get to coffee and liqueurs."

"Most hospitable, suh," Wylie replied, waiting for Vivian to give him his cue.

"I'm afraid our accident is worse than engine trouble, Mr. Granville," she put in quickly. "We seem to have struck a floating log and sheared off a propeller blade. Very difficult to repair, our mate says." Her small, graceful gesture indicated Malliard, standing at a respectful distance, as the mate.

"Propeller, eh? Can't be fixed this side of a dockyard. Well," said Granville, now completely subjugated, "I guess your trouble's my good fortune. You, Colonel, and your daughter are my guests. The *Iroquois* 'll take you in tow. Speed's no object at present."

He returned Vivian's electrifying smile with interest. "In fact, speaking as a lonely widower, just cruising about and bored to death—I won't mind how long it takes to get you safe to port."

CHAPTER III

Million Dollar Intrigue

MALLIARD sought the first opportunity to speak with Vivian alone. "I have been long shut away, Madame. But I still have an eye for men. That Granville is no fool, beware of him."

"I'm not underestimating him. He understands French. Nobody else on board does, according to him. Make an excuse to address him in French,

Tristan. He'll want you with us. And I shall need you with us."

"Command me," Malliard said quickly.

"When I need you most, be sure you are ready for anything, Tristan," she said earnestly. "And meanwhile, we can't risk them catching me in a lie about the *Esmeralda*, can we? Matteo mustn't know. See that the *Esmeralda's* propeller is really damaged. Be sure Brune watches over Pedro. Say nothing of what you do to anyone."

Granville suddenly came in sight along the deck. It was time to return to the *Iroquois*. Malliard saluted Vivian respectfully

THE vivacity of The Lady from Hell at dinner stirred Wylie's admiration even as it obviously quickened the pulse beat of Myron T. Granville. None could have imagined, observing her, that she was virtually in a trap of her own designing, and that neither she nor Wylie—nor Malliard when furtively consulted—could discern any way of shortening their cruise with, and now utter dependence upon, the multi-millionaire.

Wireless code flashes were still coming in, proving the French, as Pedro had predicted, were not going to lose a Lerulot, a Malliard or a Brune without searching far and wide to run them down or determine their fate. The wireless reported that the dugout canoe had been found, afloat and empty, leading to the latest warning that the convicts must have gained control of a swifter and more seaworthy craft.

The *Iroquois*, with the power yacht in tow, was cruising at a comfortable eight knots. Granville was gallantly evasive when Vivian asked their destination. She noticed that he drank rather heavily, and showed it not at all. Truly a man armed for contest; masterful, wary—and now as fascinated as any callow youth.

She held all his interest and his attention, while Wylie was left to converse with the master of the yacht, Captain McNeal, or roam about as he pleased. Vivian knew that if there were valuables in the safe, her partner would need time to discover it. And if any other prize—or any unforeseen peril—lurked on board the *Iroquois*, Adrian Wylie, most invaluable of subordinates, would straightway find it out.

Pleading exhaustion from the varied events of the day, Vivian retired to her stateroom about ten. It was as roomy as all the cabins of the *Esmeralda* combined. And for a moment, as on more than one previous occasion when she had deliberately set about attracting a rich or influential man, Vivian thought of how this luxury and lifelong security might be hers, if only she chose to play out the hand in a different fashion.

But then all the past crowded in, the excitement and tension of the present, a restless forward glance at the possibilities of the future. A swift attack, a quick profit, a sudden and conclusive getaway—that had been her favorite strategy always, and so it would remain. It had enriched and amused her and she asked no more.

Myron Granville might be persuaded to lay his millions at her feet. And, catching him off guard, she would pick his pocket generously, and vanish—another example of her art as a criminal.

Tonight, however, she felt a curious foreboding. With a touch of dismay, she recognized that she and Wylie were proceeding for once without teamwork, and obviously without a plan.

Dangerous — foolhardy — she must think of some way out. And thinking, she fell asleep.

IT must have been close to dawn when she awoke, instantly conscious of the presence of someone else in her cabin.

She could feel an alien presence as she had often done in times past. Long ago Wylie had said that she had "not less than five sixth-senses." This instantaneous alertness after sound sleep was one of them.

Vivian lay very still, one hand thrust under her pillow. With groping finger tips she felt for the revolver. Then with a start of chilling alarm she discovered it was not there. What stupidity! She had kept it with her every minute since accepting their complement of strange ocean guests. She had never trusted the fugitive convicts. Why be such a fool as to grow careless on board the yacht of a Myron T. Granville? She realized she had forgotten to slip the gun out of the pocket of the white serge jacket she had been wearing before she changed to a dinner gown.

Having no weapon handy, she acted at once. Speed and surprise were always her emergency arsenal.

She drew her knees up slowly, rested her weight on one elbow, and turned slightly out of the berth. Her catlike quickness had never been more pronounced.

Her outstretched hand barely brushed the intruder, then on to the cabin wall, the door, the wall again. In split-seconds she had circled the small compartment, reached a dressing table. Her fingers dropped familiarly upon a metal tube. Up swung the electric torch. *Click!* Its blinding white beam fell upon the hesitant, apepoised figure of a man leaning near the berth she had vacated.

It was the ex-warder, the formerly notorious monster of tropic discipline, Pedro de Martinque. But how had he escaped from the *Esmeralda?* He was dripping wet, she observed. And now she missed the vibration of the yacht's engines. They were not under way. What might that signify?

Vivian held the torch with grim steadiness.

But where had she left the white serge jacket? An enforced habit of traveling light and, almost constantly, of spendthrift haste, made her careful in choosing her wardrobe, but utterly careless about preserving it. That jacket—the revolver? And who was going to be the first to move?

Pedro, his badly inflamed eyelids in agony from the torch glare, moved first. He shifted his feet, bobbed his head.

"Well?" said Vivian.

"I have come to warn you," Pedro gulped.

"That, like Lerulot, you prefer to go overboard and swim for your life?" Vivian's French was a rapid snarl; her tone mocking, defiant. "Speak!"

Pedro dropped to his knees, head lowered, beaten.

Not many days ago the most hated and dangerous man in South America, outcast from humanity, outlawed from Africa, that broiling journey while cruelly bound in the dugout canoe had sapped all his overbearing volcanic impulses.

HE had been half menacing, half grotesque as he stood there, sodden and sun-scorched, with bulging muscles straining the cotton shirt and white drill trousers, sizes too small, which Matteo had lent him. Now

in this unexpected, cowering pose, he was not merely animal and abject, he was revolting.

"I came to warn you," he insisted.

"Then go ahead!"

"Those convict rats—"

"Begin by telling me how you escaped."

"Brune left Matteo to guard me. Matteo is afraid of you since you threatened him and his sons and let Lerulot drown. Matteo feared what Malliard and Brune were plotting, and I persuaded him to cut me free."

"You couldn't swim from the *Esmeralda* to this boat."

"I did swim it. They're now almost side by side."

"Go ahead, tell the rest," she urged, the torch still as steady as a rock.

"Malliard and Brune, as you'd expect if you knew such scum as I know 'em," he whined, "plotted to seize the *Iroquois*."

"Don't lie," Vivian snapped, but her pulse had leaped at his words. Somehow she knew it was true.

"I'm not lying," said Pedro. "Matteo told me. He's scared to death, and no wonder. Piracy's one thing no country stands for—"

"Piracy!" exclaimed The Lady from Hell. Even the torch wavered perceptibly. Her green eyes flashed fire. After weeks of comparative inactivity, to land in a vortex of such mad, such stimulating excitement. "Go on—tell what you know—"

"Malliard first signalled the *Iroquois* that the tow-line had fouled. That stopped their engines. They sent back a boat and three men to fix it. The men were unarmed, of course. Malliard had a gun he'd stolen from Matteo's locker.

"Nothing was wrong with the tow-line. But he made one of the *Iroquois* men yell something—I couldn't hear what—but that got them to maneuver the big yacht, so the two were close together.

"Malliard bound everybody, but Matteo not tight enough. The men from this boat were knocked out cold. Malliard, Brune and Despard—who's not so done in as he's been pretending—took the yacht seamen's uniforms, came aboard the *Iroquois* easy enough and took control. As soon as they could arm themselves, the odds didn't matter."

"How did they know where to find the arms on this vessel?"

"Malliard, posing as your mate on the *Esmeralda*, got it all out of one of the seamen who brought Granville aboard."

Vivian stabbed him suddenly with a telling question.

"And how did you know which cabin was mine?"

Pedro gulped, swallowed painfully, did not answer.

"I thought so," said The Lady from Hell. "You'd better find your tongue, man. Just where do you come in on this?"

"Matteo was scared half to death. He's no pirate. I'm no pirate. Somebody had to warn you people on the yacht. It's Malliard's plan to load all who won't join him—which would be most everybody—on the *Esmeralda*, then tow it far off the ship lanes, wait for a storm and cut the tow-line.

"With propeller out of commission—and I think he's smashed the steering gear—you can see what would happen. Not to you, of course. Malliard's only doing this to get you away from all the others."

"A likely yarn," said Vivian, but again some instinct told her Pedro could not have invented any of it.

"You came to warn me, eh? Repaying me for saving your life?"

"Yes—yes, that was it," he said eagerly.

"Just luck brought you to my cabin?"

"I crept about till I found you. Malliard and the others didn't hear me climb aboard."

VIVIAN was tense. The smallest sound, the least movement was always enough to warn or to inform her. Now, in a twinkling, she understood what the situation really was. Coolly she turned her back on Pedro, a calculated act of contemptuous indifference. He had thought she was armed with more than the torch. She deliberately switched on her cabin light and put the torch aside.

Pedro, still grovelling, loudly sucked in his breath. She was the most entrancing creature he had ever seen; and her easy mastery only added fascination for him. A brute, informer and bully, he had always abused any powers he had, while fawning upon superiors who had more.

Vivian's body was erect and slender in a cobweb thin gown; a tube of sheerest emerald green. Her flame-colored hair was an angry, molten cloud. The web-like embroidery over her breasts rose and fell evenly, unexcitedly, with her breathing. She was like a goddess, insolent, unhurried. She took two steps, picked up a foamy negligée—was about to slip it on—

And her eyes fell on the white serge jacket, flung over the back of a chair. It had been under the negligée.

It was characteristic of her that she picked up the jacket, rather than drop the revolver from its pocket, permitting her adversary the notion that she might be weak or afraid. And it was equally characteristic that, armed, Vivian Legrand was no more confident, commanding, or composed, than she had been all along, while mentally groping to locate the jacket and resolve the odd situation confronting her.

She held jacket and negligée easily, so that they made a billowy rampart from behind which she faced Pedro and the cabin door, standing ajar. Her voice lifted slightly.

"Come in, Mr. Granville," she said, "and rid me of your spy."

Myron Granville, still pompous looking, but taut, his face less florid, with white serge trousers belted over a blue silk pajama coat, blocked the doorway. He held—rather awkwardly—a blue steel automatic of heavy caliber.

She left the burden of speech to him, and he fumbled for sarcasm. "How nice! The Southern colonel and his fair daughter not precisely what they seem, eh? Harboring convicts, letting lunatics drown—dodging the police, perhaps?"

Vivian cut him sharply where she knew it would hurt. "You handle that gun, my dear, like the last surviving veteran of the War of 1812. May I call you Granny hereafter? Put it down," she snapped, "before you bump yourself on the back of the head."

Granville's face reddened slightly.

"I don't advise you to presume on my seeming awkwardness," he said. "Naturally I am not accustomed to shooting guests aboard the *Iroquois*—"

"But I've heard you've never missed your aim shooting a corporation out from underneath its stockholders, Granny."

"You'll spare yourself nothing, Mrs. Legrand, by abusing me."

Vivian, when she spoke again, raised

her voice. "Then you are inclined to offer terms?" she asked.

"I shall dictate terms!" barked the true Myron T. Granville. He came into the cabin, holding the gun now very firmly.

Vivian, as if startled, suddenly dropped the garments she had held gathered in a cloud before her. Cowering, she presented an exquisite imitation of Beauty overcome by fear. Granville, in his ignorance, saw nothing incredible in that. Pedro, who knew her better, gaped.

THEN suddenly from the corridor came a *pop*, a blinding flash of white light, and the eddying drift of flashlight smoke, as quickly swept away by the perfect ventilating system of the yacht.

Adrian Wylie stood framed in the cabin doorway. In his left hand he held a camera of the finest foreign make, and pocketing the flashlight gun with his right hand, he snapped out a serviceable Colt.

Vivian Legrand laughed lightly, stooped and snatched the jacket and negligée. She donned the latter; and from the jacket drew her own ugly-looking little gun.

"Terms," she told her confederate, "were just about to be dictated."

"Fine," Wylie said. "Let's go right ahead. Whose bid is it? His?" Wylie taunted.

Granville could only snarl at them. "You—you crooks—"

"Take it easy, Granny," Vivian said, and though her tone was mocking, her eyes were hard and menacing. "No use fooling with your blood pressure." She turned to Wylie. "Doc, how do you figure Pedro being here? Just who is running—or not running—this yacht?"

"I've been on deck," said Wylie. "Malliard and Brune seem to have everything very well in hand."

"You pirates," Granville stormed. "I'll see you all swing for this—yes, if it costs me every dollar—"

"—that we leave you, Granny," The Lady from Hell put in. "And just to correct an error and relieve the monotony of your recent conversation—*threats with us are never cheap!*"

Granville was not easily cowed, not a craven thing like the sun-blackened Pedro who, dazed and fearful, still crouched on the cabin floor. But as the millionaire started to retort, Vivian checked him.

"Every word you speak will cost you something. We have no knowledge of what the French escapers may have done. You aren't likely to believe that, but it happens to be true."

"About this camera film, Granville," said Wylie. "I daresay you're an art collector? Any picture of Mrs. Legrand is rare art, and this one is peculiarly rare because of her—ah—informal attire, her intimate pose—and you."

"Blackmail as well as piracy?" Granville snapped.

Vivian interrupted. "Doc, let me handle this," she said. "Granville, we have a photograph by a master of amateur photography—my friend here couldn't fumble a shot like that. I am in it, as you know, with you, clad as you are, threatening me with a revolver. The picture is priceless. Your many Wall Street enemies would agree. As we don't collect pictures, traveling as much as we do, this snapshot, though priceless, can be bought. Here's an auction, and you are the sole bidder. Well?"

"I won't submit to blackmail."

"I know three rich men in New

York alone who would bid against each other—very privately, to be sure—to get this tiny bit of film," said Wylie, "and have it enlarged."

Granville winced.

"To be made ridiculous, even quietly among your coterie of business associates and rivals," Wylie pursued, "would cost you millions, Granville."

"The price of the picture," said Vivian, "is now one million dollars."

"Cash, I suppose," said the rich man, sneering.

"This yacht is worth a million and we accept it. Where can we put you ashore, my dear Myron?" she said quickly.

Even Wylie looked a bit stunned by her proposal.

CHAPTER IV

Wealth Against Death

GRANVILLE opened his mouth to speak, thought better of it, and shut his bulldog jaws fiercely, his lips making a thin, purple line.

There they stood for a minute or two, deadlocked.

Tristan Malliard, looking as immaculate and striking as a musical comedy juvenile, walked briskly into the cabin. He had borrowed an officer's new white uniform, cap and white shoes. One would have needed an X-ray to discern the fugitive convict and murderer in this trim, debonair French mariner.

He glanced admiringly at Vivian Legrand, ignored Pedro, and turned upon Granville and Wylie. He addressed the millionaire owner of the *Iroquois,* but in rapid French which Granville either did not or would not understand.

"He says," Wylie translated slyly, "that your officers, who have resigned to him the command of the yacht, are afraid to tell him what orders you gave them."

"What have *my* orders to do with a gang of crooks, blackmailers and pirates?"

"That costs you another hundred thousand, Myron," said Vivian. "Price of the photograph now one million one hundred thousand dollars."

"One of the mates hinted," said Malliard, "that this man wanted to sail on and on, keeping out of the way of other ships—on your account, Madame," he told Vivian.

"Was that why you would have prolonged our voyage, Myron, with the *Esmeralda* in tow?" she asked. "How gallant!"

"You forget, I mistook you for decent Americans," he shot back.

"The film in your camera, Wylie, will now cost him a cool million and a quarter," said The Lady from Hell.

Malliard asked about the picture they were mentioning, and was told what had occurred while he and his companions, under cover of night, were gaining control of the yacht. That brought the silent, cringing Pedro to his attention. Malliard drew his revolver.

"Get up—come along with me!" he ordered, and then turned to explain to Vivian.

"We saw him sneaking aboard. I knew Matteo would be against us. He has no nerve at all. And it seemed to me safer to have Pedro here with us. He could do us no harm, as Brune and I already had seized all the firearms—"

"Except this!" Granville's voice was high pitched and metallic. He sounded deranged.

A man used to giving orders, to dominating those around him, inspiring fear and awe, a man who always

bought his way, who was not able to endure opposition, who had stopped at nothing in gaining wealth and power—the tormenting events of the night had brought him now close to the breaking point.

So little had they heeded him as an adversary that Wylie, gun in hand, and Vivian likewise ready, had not troubled to disarm their angry host. Malliard also was equipped to shoot. And against such odds Myron Granville undertook to assert himself.

His right arm was swinging up. He took hasty, awkward aim. There was a flash, a sharp, jarring report that echoed loudly in the confined space. Pedro de Martinque, eager to serve so much money, at once leaped to Granville's assistance.

THE bullet grazed the scalp of Malliard, and blood streamed down upon his spotless uniform coat.

Vivian fired, a tardy shot because so carefully aimed. She knocked the gun ut of Granville's hand. It was numbed, and he clasped it anxiously; but the impact of the bullet on the weapon had made no mark upon his flesh.

Pedro, true to a treacherous nature, lurched at Wylie, striking at the precious camera he held tucked under one arm. Malliard, though handicapped by the blood that half blinded him, fired at Pedro. Wylie, taking one quick backward step, fired also and at such close range the discharge scorched Pedro's damp cotton shirt.

Hit in the mouth by Malliard, and in the chest by Wylie, the ex-warder of Cayenne cried out hoarsely and spun around, once, twice, with an odd, demented velocity. On the third turn he suddenly went limp and crashed to the floor of the cabin.

Vivian stood over him, callously gestured with her gun.

"Stone dead," she said to Wylie. "You'd better look after Tristan. I'll keep my eye on Granny here—he's pinched his finger."

The millionaire grew purple with fury and frustration.

"Pedro was your faithful dog, and on very short acquaintance. Strange what would draw you two together," she added, eyeing Granville contemptuously. "He was as low a specimen as I ever saw in human form. When he came sneaking to you tonight, told you who he was, and about the escaping convicts added to our crew, you believed him at once. And your first thought was to send him prowling into my cabin while I slept. I'd locked that door, Granville. You gave the beast a duplicate key you'd been saving, eh?"

He meant to keep silent, to ignore her scorn. But those burning eyes of hers extorted a feeble self-defense.

"You and this man were deceiving me, betraying my hospitality in a contemptible fashion," he said. "I took any advantage that offered. I had to know whether you were imposed upon—intimidated by the fugitives—or were in league with them in their scheme of piracy. Using that fellow as a spy, hearing you talk to him, gave me my answer right enough."

"Which was, that we are pirates?"

A crime you'll swing for, so help me!"

"You only keep boosting the price you'll pay for that postage stamp of film. It's small, but it will enlarge, and then you'll have to resign from your clubs—the American newspapers will make it a nine days' wonder and you a laughing stock!"

His hand had stopped aching from the bullet's shock, and his temper was

a furnace of molten hate. He started to answer her hotly, but stopped short. He was listening. Vivian also listened. Wylie, improvising an emergency dressing for Malliard, paused.

Granville broke the silence, laughing harshly, mirthlessly. Malliard sprang to his feet, his wound only half bandaged.

Elsewhere aboard the *Iroquois* a vague stir of commotion spread and resounded. Running feet along the decks, a shot, voices shouting, the sound of heavy blows, a wild cry in the night, then a splash. More shouting, more shots, a crackling broken volley, a fusillade.

Malliard dashed out to join his evidently hard-pressed comrades. But he was already too late.

Brune and Despard were not his equal as strategists, combatants or ordinary sentries. Those shots fired in Vivian's cabin—two, and then two more, close together—had signalled the imprisoned officers to attempt to overthrow the opposition. Their captors' strength was, of course, unknown, or they would have hazarded the break much sooner.

DESPARD was still weak, and badly hurt in the first surprise. Driven back against the rail, overpowered, beaten, he still fought savagely and was finally tossed, half conscious, into the sea. Brune tried to keep the attackers away from the store of arms. But as they increased their number by liberating other members of the *Iroquois* crew, he could not stay their rush.

Shouting to Malliard, he was backing toward the cabin, when a burst of gunfire caught him in its tornado path.

Uncertain as to the actual connection between the men who had briefly dominated the yacht and the guests of its owner, a selected group of armed men stole toward Granville's suite, to set him free if necessary, or receive his orders.

Malliard just at that moment dashed out of Vivian's stateroom and turned aside in the corridor by which they were approaching. He saw them dimly, recognized them as foes, for they were too many to be his accomplices.

Recklessly he opened fire. They returned his fire, a withering deadly blast. He was barely agile enough to dodge back in time.

Acrid powder smoke clouded the corridor, drifted into Vivian's stateroom. Hearing the fusillade so near, Vivian and Wylie looked at each other with a kind of consternation, rare indeed in all their past campaigns of triumphant offensive. They had not planned this mad piracy. That was young Malliard's handiwork.

Yet Myron Granville accounted them pirates-in-chief. Pedro had talked, had probably lied. He now lay dead. Malliard might already have perished. Vivian and Wylie stood to suffer for the foolhardiness of others. Granville would be vengeful, merciless, they knew.

And where, for that matter, was the furious yacht owner?

He had vanished. Smoke of battle had camouflaged his flight. Their perfect hostage was now out of their sight. Malliard, stained with blood and stalled by the accurate shooting of his foes, crept back to the shelter of Vivian's cabin. He had suffered two more superficial wounds. And his welcome from the pair who had thought him already slain was the opposite of cordial.

"Does every Frenchman think he was born to play Napoleon?" Vivian

raged at him. "We should have left the pack of you to rot in that canoe."

"I know," said Malliard abjectly. "I have got you into bad trouble—"

"We've begun to notice it!" The Lady from Hell turned to her partner. "Doc, we'd better hide that camera film. Granville's vanity is bigger than his bank account. That flashlight picture is all we'll have to strike a bargain with."

Wylie pointed to the camera he had put aside out of the way on a chair. It was shattered. The film roll was undoubtedly damaged, if not hopelessly exposed and perforated. A ricochetting bullet from a revolver of heavy caliber had crashed into it, working this final ruin.

"Then," said Vivian Legrand, always at her best in leading a forlorn hope, "we'll have to use something else." She fiercely swept Malliard into her plans. "Both of you do exactly as I say.

"I had Granville right where we wanted him till Pedro was allowed to escape and somebody started playing pirates—"

"All my fault," Malliard admitted.

"Shut up! Now our one chance is to maneuver Granville back to where I had him. Quick now—lock and barricade that door. They'll be creeping up on us. Drag Pedro's carcass somewhere out of sight. I'll not want it till later.

"You, Tristan, you're bleeding like a stuck pig. I've got to be made up to look fatally wounded. Get busy, both of you, daub and decorate me."

SHE cast aside the negligée, standing before them in vivid, slender magnificence. And now she posed herself for sudden death, motioned Tristan to hurry. The Frenchman was weak and unsteady from his wounds, but obediently he knelt and daubed the ivory flesh of her throat and shoulders with his blood.

"Not my face!" Uncertain of the effect, she improved upon it, moving over without a qualm to lie among the dark stains marking the spot where Pedro had expired.

"Hide that camera, anyhow, Doc. Tristan, you have two guns? Both loaded?"

"Yes."

"Put them here under me. Can they be seen?"

"Not now."

"Good! Doc, give him my gun. You have yours. Those two you'll surrender. I'm the emergency arsenal." She issued further orders, then closed her eyes and by an artful trick of will composed her form and features to an utterly convincing replica of the insensible lassitude heralding death.

Following her plan the men thrust aside some of the furniture barricade, opened the cabin door a few inches, and commenced shooting wildly. Myron Granville's shrill anger could be heard between the shots, ordering his crew to return to the attack.

A volley crashed, and another, then sporadic firing. Wylie and Malliard hugged the walls, careful of angles as Vivian had commanded. She alone was dangerously exposed to a ricochet. By a miracle no glancing slug seared her.

Wylie and Malliard, having each discharged five shots, were now curiously silent. They left the door ajar. This was the crisis—the great moment of multiple perils.

Would Myron Granville so inflame his men, who must have suffered casualties, that they would charge in and massacre the trio? Or had Vivian Legrand judged his temperament as

accurately as in the past she had judged other men of wealth and consequence?

Granville presently boomed, "Have you had enough, you crooks?" That didn't sound promising. "Do you surrender?"

"Make him come nearer," Vivian whispered.

But Granville approached them cautiously, fearing a trap. "I say—do you surrender?" he thundered, with a snarl.

"Yes—yes," Wylie groaned weakly. "Hurry—"

Granville did not hurry. But after a bit the door was pushed open slowly. A heavily armed seaman peered in. Then the burly owner of the *Iroquois* thrust him aside and started into the battle-scarred compartment.

"Throw down your arms!" he commanded from the doorway. The "Napoleon" that lurks in many masterful men of affairs had, as Vivian expected, come to the fore in him as he sniffed the smoke of gunpowder.

Malliard crouched as one half dying beside the arrow-straight stricken form of Vivian. Wylie anxiously bent over her, seeming to work upon a ghastly throat wound with fingers that trembled with anguish.

Granville stepped closer.

"Good heavens!" he said, startled.

He saw her more beautiful now then he had discerned heretofore, or even had imagined. And now she was lost—dying, or already dead.

She had fascinated him, and even when Pedro de Martinque came with his tale of deception and plotting, the thought had soared in Granville's self-centered brain that Vivian being a criminal rather than the daughter of a well-to-do gentleman only gave him more power over her. But now, though he had never denied himself what he wanted, his wealth would not weigh against death.

CHAPTER V

Vivian Makes a Sale

WYLIE and Malliard had cast their revolvers aside. Both perfectly feigned their concentration upon the ebbing life of Vivian. Granville was influenced by their pacific attitude. Here was surrender—and more.

He waved back his men who were following him on tiptoe.

"There's a chance, I think," Wylie suddenly exclaimed. "Dim the lights a little. She mustn't be moved. We can make her comfortable right here. Send for whatever medical supplies you have on board."

"But—" Granville started to object.

"Let's forget what's past for a moment. I'm a qualified doctor, no matter what else you may think me."

Granville began issuing orders, dispersing his men. A new worry had come to him. Criminals or not, to have a woman shot to death on his yacht meant an inevitable leak into the American press, then the exaggerations of his enemies—scandal with a big S. Who would listen to his honest explanations?

"We must try to save her. Full speed ahead. We'll make for the nearest good sized port," he said.

"Hurry that first-aid kit!" Wylie urged.

Granville repeated his order. He had returned to stand close beside the two men crouching over Vivian. This was the closest he had been to them, yet was not quite close enough. He bent lower, worried, admiring, suddenly suspicious.

"Where is the wound?"

"Glancing bullet, just below the ear —internal hemorrhage," said Wylie, and then the signal Vivian had planned, in order that she might be warned when he was really near. "Look! She's coming to!"

The eyelids trembled, opened. Vivian's eyes were actually misty with pain, troubled, wondering.

She sighed faintly.

"Send for brandy, quick!" said Wylie.

The yacht owner nodded to a seaman, who hurried out, leaving only one man remaining on guard by the door.

Vivian sat up. "But you must not—" Granville started protesting.

Wylie and Malliard reached for the two hidden guns. But Malliard was weak and fumbled his. Vivian herself, by a lightning twist of her supple form, snatched it up. Wylie had Granville covered.

The armed guard at the doorway was staring, aghast. The combined shock of Vivian's resurrection and her revelation of loveliness was too much for his wits.

"Get out. Quick, drop that gun, or we'll kill Mr. Granville," she snapped at the seaman. And the man obeyed; let his weapon fall, and turned and ran.

"Tristan, pull yourself together!" She swept with feline grace to the door, slammed it shut, began rebuilding the furniture barricade. Malliard hurriedly helped her.

GRANVILLE, strangely silent, unprotesting, stood in the center of the stateroom. He ignored Wylie's revolver close to his ribs, and seemed absorbed in the spectacle of Vivian's intense leadership.

She resumed her negligée and turned toward him, saying:

"The fortunes of war!"

"For the second time I trusted you. No wonder you take me for a fool," said the millionaire.

"I take you for a smart man who wants no scandal and knows when he's had enough." It was just before sunrise. She switched off the cabin lights and fiery glints of the new day coming were reflected by her cloud of hair.

"You've got me prisoner," said Granville, "but you'll have to deal with the master of this yacht, McNeal. He's a hard man."

"But loyal to you?"

"Naturally."

"Very well." She turned back to her companions. "We'll have to bind and gag him, so that he can't make a move or sound. Also I want that signet ring—"

"Don't be cheap," said Granville. A gold ring, only valued as an heirloom. What is it worth to you?"

"We'll return it. You can have it sterilized if you like." Her cryptic remark puzzled Granville and worried him. He was no longer bellowing and masterful. What troubles would overtake him next? And so he offered no resistance to their gag and bonds.

"Now, Doc," said The Lady from Hell. "A touch of surgery. Look at Granville's fingers, then pick one of Pedro's that can be made to resemble it and chop it off. We'll slip on the ring as further disguise—" She saw that even Wylie, hardened to her stratagems, was aghast. "Have I got to attend to this, too?" she demanded. "How else can we bring McNeal to terms? If he sights another ship, or resorts to his wireless—"

Wylie nodded and turned away with a grimace to Granville, whose eyes above the gag were saucers of amazement. What a woman!—they seemed to say. And what a lucky escape! To

think that he had wanted to have her in his power!

Outside in the corridor all remained quiet. Officers and crew must be conferring on the rescue of their employer.

Calling through the battered door panel, Vivian insisted on treating with none but the yacht's captain. McNeal was obdurate. She then warned him to wait and listen. She signed to Malliard, who had been rehearsed, and he uttered a terrible groaning outcry.

"Just a bit of amputation, Scotty," she jeered. And Pedro's finger, bearing the signet ring of Granville, was tossed out through a crack of the door.

"You—you foul monsters!" McNeal was beside himself. "I'm master on my own deck—power of life and death. And by God, I'll string you up—"

"Ears and nose will follow, unless you do as you're told."

After a minute's thought, Granville's chief retainer capitulated.

The terms were, first, surrender of all available firearms. Malliard knew what weapons were on board. Protected from a rush by the barricade, he could see what revolvers and rifles the seamen brought and piled at the threshold of Vivian's stateroom.

Then Malliard gathered them all in, protected by Wylie and Vivian with guns ready.

THE odds were still great, but disarmed men were not likely to attack unless Granville urged it. His gag was removed, so that he could reassure the baffled McNeal about the apparent mutilation of his hand.

"Save that signet ring, but toss the finger overboard," Vivian called, still capitalizing her display of extreme callousness by means of which she had been able to dominate every man on board. "Send two men in with a sheet of canvas, to dispose of what goes with the finger. And tell the chef to hurry along a hearty breakfast *for four*."

She went to the adjoining bathroom and changed to sports attire. Granville was still bound and closely guarded, but a kind of exhausted amity had taken possession of the antagonists aboard the *Iroquois*.

"You'll land the three of us at Tobago," The Lady from Hell dictated as they sat down to breakfast, still heavily armed. "And no questions asked. You don't trust us, and I can't blame you, so you may have our clothing, all our baggage, everything we take with us searched—"

"Why?" Granville questioned.

"To make sure we sell you every scrap of camera film that Wylie or I brought on board your yacht."

"And the price?"

"How much cash in the safe when you looked?" she asked Wylie.

"Forty thousand and some odd hundreds—"

"You broke into my safe last evening while—"

"Yes—while you were discussing I know not what with my 'daughter.' I left everything just as I found it."

"We never steal, you see, Granville," Vivian explained. "We only sell useful and necessary things—in this case, camera film. The price was once very much higher, you remember. But forty thousand cash will be accepted. We rebate the rest for a safe passage to Tobago and a letter signed by you inviting Wylie and Malliard and me to take this short cruise as your guests aboard the *Iroquois*. That'll take care of any future charge of piracy."

THE END

The guard never knew what struck him

The Spanish Prisoner

By

Eugene Thomas

SUDDEN consternation flooded the Lady from Hell as she surveyed the interior of her cabin on the steamer *San Stefano*.

The cabin had been searched, searched thoroughly and carefully. The few dresses that had been given her had been ripped from their hangers in the little clothes closet and tossed on the floor. Swiftly she stepped inside the cabin, locked the door, ran to the bathroom . . . and halted.

That Impregnable Spanish Prison Could Not Stop The Lady from Hell from Attempting the Jail Delivery of Cruz Delgado, Europe's Most Notorious Bandit Chieftain

The long oblong mirror lay on the floor, and the space behind it was empty of the article she had hidden there . . . a money belt containing eight thousand dollars.

The Lady from Hell and her companion in crime, Adrian Wylie, had been passengers on the steamer *Esteban,* fleeing from the Republic of Monteverde. The steamer had gone up in flames, and the enormous treasure of jewels and bonds that the two had gathered in their criminal association had burned with the ship. The only thing that had been saved from the catastrophe was a money belt containing eight thousand dollars . . . a belt that had belonged to Miguel, the renegade captain of the *Esteban.* The Lady from Hell had taken it from the captain herself before he died.

And now that was gone. The two were penniless. The only clothes they had were articles that had been contributed by kind hearted passengers of the *San Stefano,* after the two had been picked up from the open boat in which they had drifted for days after the holocaust on the *Esteban.*

A TRIO OF "LADY FROM HELL" STORIES

"The Spanish Prisoner" is the first of a group of three LADY FROM HELL short novelettes—each complete in itself—but forming a trio of continued and related episodes. These are presented in this and the two following issues of *DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY.*

Readers will be interested to know that, although the LADY FROM HELL stories are fiction, they are based on fact. The glamorous adventuress of the series was the notorious blackmailer, "Babe" Carrington, who called herself "Vivian Legrand" in one or two instances, but never habitually. The famous Spanish bandit, Cruz Delgado, whom she meets early in this first episode, operated for a while in South America. His extradition from that continent to Spain is true, and it is at that time in his career that "The Spanish Prisoner" begins the amazing tale of his encounters with the red-headed LADY FROM HELL.

The screening lashes of The Lady from Hell lifted like a momentarily raised curtain, disclosing in the green orbs a leaping flame of fire, hot and wild as the flames in the heart of a driftwood fire, as she took in the significance of the situation.

Then her eyes lit on the door leading from the bathroom to the other cabin. The bath was so constructed that it could be utilized as a communicating bath between the two cabins . . . the one occupied by Vivian, and the other on the other side. Ordinarily the door to the other cabin was fastened with a bolt. She saw now that the bolt had been sawn through by a slim instrument inserted through the crack between the door and the jamb.

Fire blazed again under her brows, a flame of greenish scorching anger, sudden as the outburst of a smouldering volcano. She knew then what had happened. The cabin into which that door led had been occupied by a tall, slim man who claimed to be Portuguese. And Vivian knew that both the man and her money were no longer on the ship. The man had disembarked at Las Palmas—and the ship had sailed from there half an hour before. Already the mountains of the island were becoming purple shadows on the horizon.

She had been on deck with Wylie watching the ship draw away from the land, or she would have discovered her loss sooner. Undoubtedly the man had waited until the last moment! Come to think of it, she remembered now that he had hurried down the gangplank an instant before it was drawn in, and the ship pulled away.

And to think that she, the criminal scourge of three continents, had been robbed by a cheap sneak thief and

robbed of the funds that Wylie and herself were counting on to give them a new start on their criminal career, was particularly galling and humiliating.

There was nothing that she could do. She could not return to Las Palmas. A radio message might bring the arrest of the man. But he would undoubtedly have prepared for that, and unless the money were found on him, there would be no proof that he was the thief.

With an eloquent lift of her shoulders she turned and went back on deck.

Adrian Wylie, recovered somewhat from the strain of exposure in the open boat in which they had drifted, and his broken ribs expertly bandaged, was lying in the cushioned deck chair where she had left him. The moment that Vivian Legrand appeared in sight he sensed that something was amiss and closed the book he was reading.

With a lithe catlike movement she dropped in the chair next to him and in a few swift sentences told him of their loss and her belief of the identity of the thief.

WYLIE was silent a moment after the crushing news. Giving the impression of a scholarly and dignified gentleman of independent means, there was nothing about him to hint that for years he had been a consummate crook, any more than there was about the Lady from Hell to suggest that she was the world's most glamorous criminal.

Tall, lean and impressive, Wylie gave far more the impression of a man of affairs, a banker perhaps, than the whimiscal, yet prudent and incalculably gifted criminal that he was when the Lady from Hell had first met him in the house of the Mandarin Hoang Fi Tu in Manila. He had been an opium addict then. Now, under the urging of that gifted brain of his, he had completely thrust the drug from his life. And he was never to touch it again during his association with the Lady from Hell.

He, no less than Vivian realized the seriousness of the position in which they found themselves.

"Napoleon said," he murmured thoughtfully, "that an army moves on its stomach, and most certainly, two people in the business in which we are engaged move on the money they pay out—money in bribes, in paying helpers, in securing the information that they must have."

He made a little gesture of helplessness.

"Of course," Vivian said thoughtfully, "there are a few hundred scattered here and there in banks—in Paris—in London, but . . ."

"But," Wylie cut in, "in order to get hold of those few hundred dollars we must first get to Paris and to London."

"And," Vivian went on thoughtfully, "front is one of the most important weapons we have. Without money for clothes . . . Adrian, do you realize that we haven't even enough money for a hotel when we reach Cadiz, or for . . ."

She halted, stiffened and broke off in the midst of the sentence. Her glance, with startled intensity struck on the face of a tall, swarthy man who swung past in the company of another man a smaller one. There was calculation mixed with speculation in the glance she turned back to Wylie.

"Who is that man?" she queried. "Last night I passed his cabin. The door was partly open and the light on.

It was closed by someone almost immediately, but not before I had seen that this chap . . . the tall one . . . was handcuffed to the berth railing."

Wylie nodded. "A rather silly precaution in the middle of the Atlantic, it seems to me," he said, "but then I suppose the two detectives with him aren't taking any changes. That is Cruz Delgado."

"Oh, so *that* is Delgado," Vivian said, and there was decided interest in the gaze she sent after the vanishing figures, her mind mulling over the amazing possibility that had leaped into her mind. The name of Delgado had been familiar to both of them during their criminal operations in Europe. It was a familiar name in the underworld, where the exploits of the Basque brigand were discussed. A year or so before he had fled to the Argentine after a crime that included the killing of a high government official. "So he's being taken back to Spain."

Wylie nodded. "Yes, to Cadiz . . . I don't think his life will be worth much after he gets back."

"Probably not," the Lady from Hell mused, "and I suspect that he knows it."

THERE was a curious quality in her voice that Wylie did not miss . . . a quality that had not been there before. Though she spoke musingly, her voice seemed to be pulled from the depths of something that was apt to be dynamite when it rose to the surface.

"Undoubtedly," agreed Wylie drily. His eyes were very bright. He had worked hand in hand with the Lady from Hell far too long not to realize when she was hatching a particularly audacious scheme. "Being somewhat familiar with Spanish detectives, I have no doubt that they've explained to him in detail just what his fate will be."

"And," Vivian went on in that musing tone of voice, as her facile imagination poured like water into crevices to cement detail to detail in a slowly unfolding scheme, "if he found himself in a position to thumb his nose at the law again, I suspect that he might be inclined to be exceedingly grateful to the person . . . or persons . . . who made that possible."

Wylie sat up suddenly. Through all her criminal career the Lady from Hell had been guided by what Wylie, in later years, described as a rare sense of intuition that had enabled her to carry through her numerous schemes. And he knew, without doubt, that she had recognized in the situation before her an opportunity to turn it to their advantage.

"What harebrained plot are you concocting now?" he demanded.

"Not a harebrained plot at all," the Lady from Hell said coolly. "I simply intend to release Cruz Delgado from his detectives and make it possible for him to escape . . . for a price, of course."

"Don't be an idiot," Wylie said. "We're in the middle of the Atlantic, we're practically penniless, and when this ship arrives in Cadiz, Delgado will be met by a squad of the marine police who will take him in charge. What chance have you of getting him free?"

"I have an idea," Vivian said slowly.

"Well?" Wylie demanded.

She shook her head. "It's too vague to put into words. I've got to puzzle it out. But I think, Adrian, that we'll land in Cadiz with enough money to give us a start, anyhow."

Wylie looked genuinely worried.

"I wish, Vivian, that you would wait until I am well enough to be of some help to you. Seeing you run headlong into danger when I am still so banged up isn't improving my peace of mind."

Vivian rose and patted him on the shoulder.

"Don't you worry about me, Adrian. I can take care of myself."

"All the same," he insisted," I wish you'd wait before you start anything."

Vivian flared up in one of the rare bursts of anger ever displayed by her toward her companion in crime.

"Wait . . . wait . . . wait. That's all I've been hearing from you lately. How soon do you suppose another opportunity like this will drop into our laps? How long shall I wait? Until we both starve?"

Wylie laid back with a little sigh and closed his eyes. He knew that the issue was closed.

II

VIVIAN'S first concern, in her campaign, was her clothes. The several kindly women on the ship had managed to get together a small but becoming wardrobe for the unfortunate survivor of the burned ship.

Then, perfectly garbed and groomed, she proceeded to ingratiate herself with one of the two Spanish detectives who were escorting Delgado back from the Argentine. This was an easy matter. The Latin is notoriously responsive to the flicker of a pretty woman's eyes, whether he be a detective on duty, or a *caballero* at a sidewalk café table.

An inquiry of one of the detectives about a passing ship was the entering wedge to an acquaintanceship which within a few days had ripened into friendship. That in turn was followed by an introduction to the second detective and one night after dinner, under the very noses of his guards, Vivian's opportunity came.

She slipped a note into the hands of Cruz Delgado. He read it when Vivian had attracted the attention of his two guards, and five minutes later he began to complain of a headache, requesting that he be permitted to go to his cabin.

Nothing loath to be free of him in order to continue their joint pursuit of this red haired woman with the eyes that promised sublime enchantment, the two detectives handcuffed Delgado to his berth, locked the door and rejoined Vivian. In turn the Lady from Hell requested them to wait for her on the upper deck for a few minutes while she saw to the comfort of her friend with the broken ribs.

The deck was deserted as she made her way down to the porthole that belonged to the fugitive's cabin. It was in darkness, but a ray of light from the deck lamp fell across the face of the man in the berth.

Vivian leaned carelessly against the deck wall, the light from the overhead light catching her red hair and turning it into a flaming aureole above her exquisitely exotic face. To an observer she would have seemed a woman leaning casually against the wall with no thought of the open porthole beside her. Her call, low, guarded, had nevertheless sufficient carrying power to reach the man.

"I did as you said," Delgado whispered, "but I do not understand why you wished it."

"I thought that perhaps you might wish to escape," Vivian answered swiftly.

The man strained upward against his handcuffs, his face working eagerly. He registered an impression of slightness, but in reality he was a big brute, with a face from which varied dissipations had wiped every trace of color and the strange eyes did nothing to lighten it. They were lusterless, burned out with a coldness in them that suggested the filmed eyes of a crocodile.

Those cold eyes of his now were fixed intently on Vivian's face, seen through the window.

"Escape? But of course. Can you ararnge it?"

"I can," Vivian shot back at him. "For a price."

"Yes, yes, of course," the man said eagerly. "How much of a price?"

"That depends," Vivian told him coolly, "on how much money you have."

"I have five hundred pesetas," he said thoughtfully, but there was a curious note in his voice.

"Is that all your life is worth?"

"It is all I have." He insisted.

"So," Vivian said harshly. She did not miss the cunning which lifted a corner of the man's lips. At the bottom of her eyes a light flashed and went out. "You would attempt to bargain, with your life as the stake. I know that Detective Sanchez has three thousand pesetas he is keeping for you. I want that three thousand . . . and more . . . as the price of your liberty."

"I tell you I have no more," the man snarled.

"A man is dead a long time," Vivian said, and her voice crackled like the snap of a whip. The light from above touched her face . . . glinted on the cold iciness of her eyes. She turned away.

"Wait," the man's voice came to her shrilly. "I have more."

His long fingers, that were like ivory claws, started to crawl back and forth on the edge of the bunk like one of the great white hunting spiders that natives of the tropics keep in the thatch of their huts to prey on the lizards and crockroaches. The resemblance was uncanny.

"How much?" Vivian queried harshly.

"Two thousand pesetas," the man said. "It is sewn in the lining of my coat and the detectives did not find it. But that is all. I swear it by the Madonna and all the saints."

Vivian leaned against the porthole again.

"That is better," she said. "Did you think me a child to believe that Cruz Delgado would not have money hidden where he could put his hands upon it in an emergency? Now listen. We reach Cadiz the day after tomorrow, and I will arrange your escape there. But there is something that you must do also."

For five minutes she talked swiftly, outlining to the bandit what he must do, and then, lest her two Spaniards on the deck above become restless, returned to them.

THERE was not a cloud in the sky as the ship moved slowly toward Cadiz, a city of white stone and marble, joined to the mainland by the slenderest strip of yellowed earth. Already the nearest of the *miradores,* towers originally built as lookouts from which the garrison could discern the approach of returning treasure-laden galleons, was looming abreast of the ship.

The driving energy that was behind Vivian never caused her to hurry or

to stumble. She knew how to attack swiftly, but her plan of attack was always thorough to the last detail. Now, with the moment of action upon her, her restless mind went around and around her plans, shoring up guards against contingencies that had not arisen, might never arise.

For the plan that she had concocted for the escape of Cruz Delgado was a daring one . . . so daring and so simple that its very simplicity made for success. It was a scheme that not one woman in a million would have attempted . . . that not one man in a million would have dreamed a woman would attempt . . . and that also made for its success.

With a last glance out of her window the Lady from Hell slipped out of her stateroom and made her way down the corridor to Cabin 12, occupied by Delgado and his two guards. Delgado, she knew, would be in the cabin, handcuffed to his berth, and the two detectives would be smoking aft.

Keeping them there had been the duty assigned to Wylie, and detectives are detectives the world over. As long as a new found friend stood ready to pay for the bottle of liquor on the table before them, they would remain in the smoking room until it was finished.

The door of the cabin was not locked. The detectives had seen no need to lock it, since their prisoner was handcuffed to the rail of his berth. What they did not know was the fact that not ten minutes before the Lady from Hell had skillfully picked the pocket of one of the detectives of a ring of keys . . . among them the key to the handcuffs.

Delgado raised his head eagerly as the door swung open. He started to speak but Vivian raised a warning hand.

"Don't talk," she said. "Somebody passing might hear."

Bending over she tried key after key until the right one clicked in the lock and the handcuffs opened.

Cautiously she peered out into the corridor. It was empty.

In a moment Vivian and the man she had released made their way along the corridor to Vivian's cabin.

After a minute Wylie arrived. A look of profound astonishment flashed over his face as he saw who her companion was.

"Good God, Vivian," he said in a tense voice, "I didn't know, when you asked me to keep those detectives busy, that this was what you intended. Bringing this man to your cabin is madness. You'll spend the balance of your life in a Spanish jail for this. Don't you know they'll search the ship . . . every inch of it . . . when they find him gone."

Cruz Delgado took a step toward Wylie, his long slender fingers working as if they longed to get at Wylie's throat.

"This is no business of yours," he began ominously, when Vivian cut him short with an abrupt gesture.

"Keep quiet," she snapped. Then she turned to Wylie. "I know what I'm doing, Adrian. Go to your cabin. Please. It would be fatal if the searchers found you here when they arrived. Stay in your cabin until I tap on the door."

"But . . ." Wylie began.

She cut him short as a glance through the porthole showed her the scarlet sails of the pilot boat rounding alongside the steamer.

"Adrian, time is precious."

Without another word he turned and left. She locked the door behind him.

"Now you," Vivian snapped to Delgado. "Get in there . . ." She flung open the bathroom door . . . "And stay there. And if you want to live, don't make a sound."

She closed the door behind him and began swiftly throwing off her clothes.

Ten minutes later a ship's officer, accompanied by a sailor and one of the detectives tapped on the door of Vivian's cabin. There was no response. The ship's officer tried the knob and, finding the door locked, opened it with his pass key.

THE cabin was deserted. A gaily colored sports dress was laid neatly across the berth. A pair of filmy silk stockings hung from the back of a chair. Intimate, lacy underthings lay in a little heap in front of the door, so close, in fact, that the men were compelled to step over them to enter. From the bathroom came the sound of splashing water and above it the sound of Vivian's voice humming a gay little Spanish air.

The two men exchanged glances and then the detective tapped on the bathroom door. The singing and the splashing stopped abruptly.

"Who is there?" Vivian demanded.

"It is an officer of the ship, *señorita,*" came back the answer. "We are searching the ship for an escaped criminal. Will you open the door, please?"

"Certainly not," she replied indignantly. "I am bathing."

"I am sorry, *señorita,* but it is of the utmost importance that we search the ship. You must open the door."

"This is most outrageous," they heard her sputter, and then the door was opened a trifle, just far enough for the officer to see Vivian clothed in a thin silken dressing gown that failed utterly to conceal her lovely form. She was wet. Water dripped from her face, her shoulders, her arms. The silken dressing gown, rapidly becoming soaked, clung closely about her, revealing the sensuous contours of her figure. It was obvious that she had just stepped from the brimming tub.

There was a strange little flicker, like fever, playing behind those slanting green eyes. Present in her was the knowledge, like the tension of muscles in the presence of fear, that she must play these men with all the subtlety that the years of her criminal life had given her.

"This is outrageous," she repeated angrily, and the most skilled actress alive could not have thrown more sincerity behind those three words. It told of the outraged modesty of a woman . . . of many things. Then, as if aware for the first time of the revealing qualities of the thin silken covering, she closed the door except for the merest crack. "I shall complain to the captain."

"I am truly sorry, *señorita,*" the ship's officer said, "but we are searching the ship for an escaped criminal."

"Am I then supposed to have him concealed in my bath," she asked in withering scorn. She had long ago learned that anger mixed with scorn is . . . next to tears . . . a woman's chief advantage against men . . . a citadel against the aggressive. "Can you think of no better place to look than a bathroom while a lady takes a bath?"

She closed the door with a bang, leaned against it listening. In that instant it was almost as if she were a tautened wire which vibrated to the least sound from the cabin outside. The pounding of her pulses which had crept up imperceptibly to a roaring

crescendo during those dragging seconds of nerve splitting suspense suddenly died down. Her blood ran cold and smooth as a river of ice.

Outside that door that had been slammed in their faces the ship's officer looked at the detective with a grin.

"I think," he said, "that we had better search elsewhere for our escaped prisoner."

The outer door closed behind them. A dozen tense seconds passed before either the Lady from Hell or the man with her moved or spoke. Then she turned to Cruz Delgado crouching under a pile of rumpled bath towels in the angle formed by the wall and the bathroom door.

"You're safe . . . so far,'" she said with a grim smile. "Now to get you ashore under the noses of the police."

III

HARDLY had she finished when the clang of the engine room bell and the shuddering of the ship's fabric from the propellers as the engines reversed and went astern told her that they were nearing the dock. A swift glance out of the bathroom window showed her that they were almost alongside. Five minutes, ten at the most and the Civil Guard would be aboard. And there would be no tricking them with the bathroom ruse. Every inch of the ship would be searched until the escaped bandit was found.

Racing against time and the inevitable search she dressed and then opened the bathroom door.

"The money," she said tersely.

The man laughed. "You take me for a fool? When I am ashore, free, then you get your money. Until then, not one peseta."

"And unless I get my money now," the Lady from Hell told him dangerously, "you will never be free. I'll call the detectives . . . tell them that I found you hiding in my cabin when I came from my bath."

Her face was impassive. Only her eyes were alive . . . they were hard, deadly bits of emerald. There were men in Havana, in Haiti, in Monteverde who could have told Delgado that the shadow of death hung in the air when that cold light glowed in the eyes of the Lady from Hell.

"But suppose your plan fails?" the man queried. "Suppose I am captured. What then?"

"That is a chance you must take," she told him flatly. "Give me the money—or I call the detectives."

Delgado laughed, a sneer in his voice. "You wouldn't dare," he said. "I would say you helped me to escape and you would spend the rest of your life in a Spanish jail."

"Oh, no," Vivian said smoothly, and before Delgado had grasped the significance of her movement her hand had moved with the speed of a striking snake . . . the tiny but deadly revolver that she was never without covered him. "Dead men tell no tales . . . or betray women who aid them. I heard a noise . . . I turned . . . a man was in my cabin . . . he attacked me . . . and I killed him . . ."

She raised her gun slowly. The face of the man opposite her had turned the color of putty. Ruthless himself, he knew the quality of deadly ruthlessness in others when he met it, and he realized that this woman was as much of a killer as any one he had ever met.

He clawed at the seams of his coat frantically, his eyes fixed on the muzzle of that gun that covered him without a tremor. Pulling out the

bank notes hidden there, he handed them to the Lady from Hell. She tucked them away. The gangplank was out now, and she saw a detail of uniformed Civil Guards swarming aboard.

"You know what you have to do," she said. "If you slip . . ." she did not finish. There was no need. Delgado could visualize, without aid, what was in store for him if he failed.

There was no one in sight in the corridor as she opened the door and peered out. Then, moving with that tigerish gait, she made her way down the corridor and turned toward the staircase that led to the deck. At its foot a uniformed Civil Guard stood barring the way.

Vivian was panting for breath, as though she had been running and her eyes were wide with fright.

The guard halted her. "You cannot pass this way, *señorita*," he said. "The passengers are to assemble in the dining saloon while the ship is being searched for a dangerous criminal."

"But I must see the captain," she said in evident distress. "The criminal . . . the man for whom they search . . . is in my cabin."

"Your cabin!" the man cried, and raised his whistle to summon a comrade. Vivian halted him. "Do not call aid," she whispered tensely, with a swift look of fear over her shoulder. "If you do, he will flee. He doesn't know that I know he is in my cabin. He is in the open space beneath the berth. If you hurry, you can capture him without trouble." Then she suggested cunningly, "It would please your officers if you captured him without aid, would it not?"

That was the clinching argument. Cruz Delgado was a dangerous criminal. To capture him single handed, with ease, and turn him over to the officer in command would mean official commendation . . . promotion.

Without another word the guard followed her down the corridor.

"It is Cabin 12," she whispered. "I left the door slightly open. Go in, and call to him to come out."

Drawn gun in hand, the man opened the cabin door, looked about, then stepped inside . . . and dropped to the floor without a sound as Delgado hit him viciously over the head with the short iron bar that Wylie had stolen for Vivian and Delgado.

Even as he struck the floor Vivian was inside the cabin, the door closed and locked and was twisting a strip of cloth about the man's mouth as a gag. He was unconscious now, but no use taking chances.

"Get into his clothes," she whispered. "Hurry," and aided the bandit to strip off the guard's uniform.

THERE was, luckily, not a great deal of difference between the guard and the escaped criminal. The uniform fitted sufficiently well to pass muster. Together they dressed the unconscious man on the floor in the garments Delgado had worn.

"From now on," she whispered to Delgado, "you must act alone. I can do nothing. You know the habits of the Civil Guard better than I do. Remain here until the man recovers consciousness. Then, keeping him gagged, with his hands bound, make him march ashore as the escaped prisoner you have captured. The officer will be in the dining saloon with the passengers. There is a guard at the head of the gangplank. If he halts you, tell him that you are taking Delgado ashore by your officer's orders. Good luck."

She stepped out and closed the door . . . heard the key click in the lock behind her. A tap on Wylie's door and her companion in crime joined her in the corridor.

"All set," she whispered. "We've got to get up into the saloon, so that we're in the clear if anything breaks."

The Lady from Hell carefully chose a seat beside a window that looked down on the gangplank, and waited as the officer in charge questioned each passenger in turn.

The heat of the Spanish midday was on the gangplank like the white hot blade of a sword. Vivian kept her eyes fixed upon it, scarcely conscious of the conversation of the two men behind her, unrelating fragments lodging in her brain but making no impression . . . until . . . "Anxious to capture . . . not so much because he's a brigand . . . what he knows . . . tremendous treasure . . . hid all his loot in mountains . . . left there when he fled to the Argentine . . . Cruz Delgado . . ."

The Lady from Hell sat up alertly, listening intently. The conversation went on.

"The officials estimate that he must have several hundred thousand pesetas hidden away. If it weren't for that, they'd shoot him as soon as they got him ashore. But the government would like to get their hands on that money, and no one but Delgado himself knows where it is hidden."

Out of the corner of her eye she saw a Civil Guard descending the gangplank holding tightly to the bound and gagged figure of a man in civilian clothes.

Delado, posing as a member of the Civil Guard, was audaciously making his escape. Another moment he would be free, lost in the Cadiz underworld.

"Oh, look!" Vivian exclaimed in a loud voice. "They've captured the man who escaped. There's a guard taking him ashore."

The officer looked up alertly.

"What is that, señorita?"

Vivian repeated what she had said and pointed through the porthole. With an exclamation the officer ran out onto the deck and toward the gangplank shouting at the two figures on their way down the plank.

Delgado realized at once that success or failure hung in the balance with seconds tipping the scales between freedom and capture. With an oath he flung the bound figure of the guard aside and made a break for the end of the wharf. But he was too late. The shouts of the officer had reached the guards at the gate and, with only ten feet separating him from the sunlit street and freedom, Delgado saw the gates close in his face. He whirled, gun in hand, to make a last stand, and a guard sprang out at him from a pile of freight. A short struggle—and he was a prisoner again.

With a little contented sigh Vivian turned back from the scene she had been watching. She wasted no thoughts upon the man she had double crossed. That was like the Lady from Hell. If a thing . . . a man . . . had no further usefulness for her, it was tossed into the discard at once, without sentiment, without regret. Likewise, if a thing . . . or a person . . . could still be useful to her, she would cling to it with every bit of savagery she possessed. In all her long and glamorous career of crime she had fought viciously for any member of her gang in trouble. And once something was in the past, she wasted no thoughts over it.

She met Wylie's puzzled eyes with a smile.

"Why did you do that, Vivian?" he whispered, under cover of the general excitement. "Why didn't you let the poor devil escape? After all, he deserved getting away. He'd paid you what you asked."

"Yes," Vivian said thoughtfully. "He paid . . . but not all he is going to pay."

THE fact that Cadiz was a strange city and that she had no extensive underworld connections was no obstacle to the Lady from Hell. There was scarcely a city of major importance in Europe where she did not know the name and address of at least one of those shadowy figures of the underworld who kept his fingers on the pulse of crime for his own benefit. In one city it might be a fence who, unsuspected by the police, handled stolen works of art; in another, a man who made it his business to finance robberies, putting up a specific sum for a specific job.

Cadiz was no exception. There was an Arab rug merchant there, Es Sayed, and it was to him that Vivian sent word, on the third day after her arrival in the city. He came, bearing a huge bundle of rugs and primed with the knowledge, obtained for a price from the Hotel Portero, that the woman who had sent for him was a wealthy Englishwoman.

He knocked on the door of her room and at her command to enter, came slowly in and dropped his bundle of rugs on the floor. He was a tall Arab, thin almost to the point of emaciation, with bony fingers and deep sunken eyes that seemed like two bits of agate set in a coffee-brown mask.

"You wish to purchase rugs," he inquired in French.

The Lady from Hell looked at him quietly, sizing him up. Her eyes, rather heavy lidded, and green as the precious tiles set in the roof of the Mosque in Mecca, were baffling.

"Not rugs," she said quietly, "information—"

Their eyes met, and they exchanged one long, calculating glance. The Arab seemed to be appraising the woman who lounged in the comfortable Madeira chair. The face that the Lady from Hell turned to his gaze was an expressive one . . . only, something that few men discovered until it was too late . . . it expressed exactly what its owner wished it to express, never anything more.

Es Sayed shook his head, stooped over to pick up his rugs.

"I sell only rugs," he returned courteously.

Vivian smiled. "To those who do now know you, perhaps. But to those who come well recommended there may be other things to be had . . . such things for instance, as a knife and the hand to wield it from behind on a dark street; poisons . . . the slower the poison the higher the price. And perhaps . . . and the Spaniards might be interested in this . . . deserters from the Spanish Foreign Legion aided in their escape to French or Italian soil."

The Arab's face darkened. He shot a swift, hooded glance from Vivian's impassive face to that of Wylie. "Who are you to dare to suggest that an honest rug merchant would meddle in such things as these?

Vivian smiled again. "I have been called," she said gently, "the Lady from Hell."

A swift smile broke the brown mask. "Allah," the man ejaculated. The name was familiar to him, as it was to every criminal of importance in every European country. He looked

at her closely and nodded. "Forgive me for not recognizing you. I have been stupid. Who is there that does not know the reputation of the Lady from Hell? What is it that you wish"

"I wish to check certain information that I have obtained from a guard at the prison," Vivian said thoughtfully. "One Manuel Vivani. I have made his acquaintance . . . no matter how . . . and for some strange reason he believes that I am attracted by him. Among the bits of information that he has given me is the statement that he is the guard in the execution courtyard of the prison. I want that statement checked, and also to find if he is the only guard on duty."

THE Arab nodded. "That will be difficult. I do not know this particular guard, but such information is easily checked." He paused a moment. "It would not be difficult to bribe a prison guard to perform a little service for you . . . such as smuggling in a message . . . but you have no guarantees that he would not turn it over to the Comandante. As for anything greater . . . it cannot be done. Not that they are incorruptible, but they are kept honest by fear. A guard who betrayed his trust would find himself facing a firing squad."

"I have no intention of bribing a guard," Vivian told him, with a grim smile. She, better than most women knew that there were lures greater than money that might be dangled before the eyes of susceptible men, and she had already considered and dismissed the possibility of smuggling in a message. "Then," she went on evenly, "I wish this purchased and brought to my room in a bundle of rugs." She handed him a slip of paper. "There must be nothing to connect me with the purchase."

The Arab glanced at the slip of paper and raised protesting hands.

"It cannot be done," he expostulated. "It is impossible. Sale of it is forbidden. Possession of it, regardless of whom, means imprisonment and possible death. What do you wish it for?"

The Lady from Hell looked at him with the unreadable, faintly slant-eyed gaze that, had he known her better, would have told him that trouble was brewing. Her voice was suddenly harsh.

"That is my business. It is your business to give me what I want . . . unless, of course, you would like the Spanish authorities to know of the deserters who come to you in the night and are fitted out with new clothes and false passports . . ."

There was behind her words a suggestion of a blade that would slice and cut if its owner loosed it. The Arab quailed before the suggestion contained in her words.

"It is a difficult thing," he said. "But I think that I can do it. I have connections . . ."

"I know," Vivian cut him short. "Now, one other thing. I wish a large scale map of the prison and the surrounding streets, particularly with reference to the execution courtyard."

"That will not be difficult," the Arab said thoughtfully. "But . . ."

He was cut short by a knock on the door. Vivian opened it. It was the hotel porter.

"Don José Obarrio is below, *señorita,*" he said.

Vivian nodded and closed the door. The Arab's eyes were wide. He had recognized the name.

"The Comandante of the prison," he breathed.

"The Comandante," Vivian agreed, drawing on her smart gloves. "I am making a tour of inspection of the prison with him." She pulled on the chic little hat and then, picking up a little cluster of flowers on the table, pinned them on her shoulder.

Wylie smiled grimly at the flowers. There was more to those flowers than met the eye. Vivian directed a long hard look at the Arab. "In the event," she said, "that you should surmise my reasons for asking these things and be tempted to betray me for a reward . . . there is a letter in the hotel office concerning you that the police would undoubtedly find if I should be arrested."

She turned and swept out of the door, leaving Wylie to complete arrangements with the Arab.

COMANDANTE Don José Obarrio might not have twirled the thin waxed spikes of his mustache as he waited in the hotel lobby if he had realized that he was being skillfully played by the Lady from Hell, as an expert angler plays a fish. Neither would it have been soothing to his vanity if he had known that the interest the woman with the flaming red hair and slanting green eyes was bestowing upon him was simply the interest bestowed upon an important pawn in a game.

It hadn't been difficult for the Lady from Hell to make the acquaintance of Don José. The gentleman had a roving eye for the ladies, and she had employed the same means on the Comandante as she had on the prison guard. She had made discreet inquiries as to the Comandante's favorite café. A tip to the waiter had secured her a table next to him. It had not been difficult to persuade him to speak to her . . . and her interest at subsequent meetings, at what went on behind the scenes in a prison had brought forth today's invitation to make a tour of the prison over which Don José ruled.

The Comandante rose and tossed away his cigarette as Vivian came down the hotel stairs.

"I am sorry to be so late," she said, "but a business matter detained me."

It would not have added to the Comandante's peace of mind, as they walked toward his official car parked outside the hotel, to have known that the "business" was a scheme to release his most prized prisoner.

There is only one building in Cadiz with thicker, more massive walls than the prison. That is the Capuchin convent which guards the Virgin of Cadiz, and the reason for those thick walls is the fact that the prison was once a church prison, used by the inquisition for heretics awaiting trail.

With a great deal of pride Don José showed the Lady from Hell his domain, and it was while passing the entrance to the quarters of the guards that catastrophe almost struck.

A guard, his uniform coat off, was lounging at the entrance. He looked up and a look of astonishment flashed over his sallow face as he saw Vivian. He started to speak, would have spoken, if the look of warning on her own face, the gesture with which she halted him, had not been unmistakable.

It was only for a moment that danger threatened. The realization came to the guard that it would not help him with the Comandante if that official knew that the woman he

escorted through the prison with such ceremony was the woman of whom this guard had such high hopes.

VIVIAN breathed a sigh of relief and the tension was unlocked from her muscles as they moved on and Manuel, the guard, did not speak. A moment or two later the Lady from Hell and her companion halted at the end of a gloomy corridor.

"And now, Señorita Legrand," the Comandante said, "that you have seen my prison, what do you think of it?"

"But I am disappointed," Vivian cried. "You have shown me nothing but iron bars and stone walls. Where are the dark dungeons, the mysterious passages, the prisoners in chains?" She threw a world of scorn into her voice. "Is your prison then merely a jail for petty thieves and such people?"

"There are dungeons," the Comandante admitted, "but you would not want to descend to them. They are dark and dirty."

"Oh, but I do," she insisted, catching his arm. "You must show them to me. Have you important prisoners there?"

"One very important one," the Comandante said. "Cruz Delgado, the bandit."

"A bandit! Oh, how romantic," Vivian gushed, but in her eyes glinted that spearhead of fire, a danger signal that even the most formidable of her associates had come to know and respect. "I must see him."

The Comandante stopped before the iron bars of a cell.

"He is there," he said.

Vivian peered into the dark little room. He did not see the swift gesture with which she put her finger to her lips and if he noticed that an exclamation died in utterance on the lips of the bandit chief, he paid no attention.

"Poor fellow," Vivian said pityingly. "How long must he remain in prison?"

"He dies tomorrow morning at dawn," the Comandante said grimly.

Vivian gave a start of dismay. The green pools of her eyes seemed to stir as if a wind had passed over them, became veiled, as if their owner wished to shut out something that might betray her. She had not expected this. She would have to work fast. Then she looked at Don José with a little pathetic smile edging her lips.

"Poor fellow," she breathed.

Before the Comandante could stop her she had ripped a cluster of flowers from where it was pinned to her shoulder and thrust them through the bars.

"Take them," she breathed to Delgado, with a little catch in her voice. "Perhaps they will comfort you before you die."

She turned away toward the staircase, followed by Don José.

"You are too soft," he said. "Delgado is a dangerous rogue."

The Lady from Hell smiled charmingly. "Alas, I cannot help it," she said with a little sigh. "It is my nature."

Behind them, Cruz Delgado's fingers were swiftly tearing at the little cluster of flowers. In his eyes and upon his face was a light like that of a condemned man who has been granted a reprieve. The Lady from Hell shot a glance over her shoulder, just in time to see him snatching from the heart of one of the flowers a thin slip of paper covered with writing.

Wylie had worked for a long time that morning to secrete that slip of

rice paper in the flower, and Delgado read the instructions it contained with glowing eyes. Then he rolled the paper into a tiny ball and swallowed it.

Dawn was hours away when the Lady from Hell and her companion left their Cadiz hotel and walked swiftly in the direction of the prison.

IV

THE afternoon and evening had been a busy one . . . one of the busiest ones in the long career of the Lady from Hell. There had been so many loose ends to tie into their scheme, and so little time in which to accomplish it. Both were dressed in dark clothes and Wylie carried a large leather bag.

They did not take a taxi. Better, Vivian reasoned, to leave no trail that might point toward her. If the scheme she planned was successful, they would have a start on a new fortune to replace the one that had been lost to them. If anything went wrong . . . there was a vivid recollection in her mind of the gloomy cells of the prison she had visited that afternoon.

There was little conversation between them. They had gone over their plans in minute detail and little remained to be said. Vivian was keenly aware of the difficulty of the thing she had set out to do. Her brain was working coolly, methodically, judicially, and in her eyes as she walked along, was a light more hard and calculating than is usually found even in the eyes of a beast of prey.

The dark little side street with an uneven narrow sidewalk and cobbled street that was their destination had been four hundred years old when Rome was founded; it had echoed to the arrogant tread of Phoenician traders eleven hundred years before the Christian era, for Cadiz is the oldest city in Spain. In the shadowy alcove of a huddle of buildings she found the spot that she sought . . . a narrow, iron barred door in the towering brick wall.

"Keep out of sight, whatever you do," she told Wylie. "Whatever happens don't show yourself until I call you. With your shattered ribs, you haven't strength enough to be of much help. Your gun is to be used only as a last resort."

Wylie, resenting the minor rôle his injuries forced him to play, melted into the shadow of one of the houses and Vivian glanced at her watch. Five minutes to three. Five minutes to the time when the Arab had told her that Manuel, the guard she had been playing, would pass the gate on his rounds.

A footstep was audible on the flagstones inside and as it came opposite the gateway the Lady from Hell rapped sharply on the doorway. The sound was clear and distinct in the stillness of the night . . . too loud, Vivian feared for a moment. The footsteps halted, then resumed, and a tiny iron wicket in the thick gateway was shot back.

"Manuel," she whispered.

The man stared out through the grating incredulously.

"You," he whispered in Spanish. "But what are you doing here?"

"I must see you," she whispered back. "That was why I persuaded the Comandante to show me through the prison today. I thought that I might see you then, but I could not talk while he was with me." She was lying expertly, but the man did not know that. "Open the gate, and let me in."

"No, no," he said, "I cannot open the gate. It is forbidden."

The keynote of her plan lay in her

persuading him to open the gate. Without that, she was doomed to failure. "But I am going away. Would you have me leave without my farewell?"

THERE was an exclamation from the man and the sound of a key grating in a lock. The door swung open and Vivian slipped through it into the courtyard of the prison.

"But you did not tell me you were going away today," Manuel told her as she slipped into his arms and nestled there.

"I did not know it until an hour ago, when I received a message," she said. "I could not go without seeing you."

"I will not let you go," he man said. "You must stay."

"I must go," Vivian told him. She disengaged herself gently from his arms and lit a cigarette, shielding the tiny glow from chance observation of some other guard about the great stone building towering above them in the darkness. "I can stay only so long as this cigarette lasts. That is all the time we have." She extended the case to him. "Smoke one with me."

There was only one cigarette left in the case. The guard took it, lit it and then launched volubly into a torrent of reasons why she should not leave. Never a shadow quivered on the face of the Lady from Hell as she watched the cigarette smoke trickle from the guard's nostrils, but in her eyes a flash came and went like unsuspected summer lighting, leaving no sign but only a memory of its passing.

She listened, interjecting a word now and then. The cigarette was half consumed when her keen ears caught the first faint hint of a hesitancy in the guard's speech; a hesitancy that grew until it seemed that the man was fighting against an overpowering sleep . . . as indeed he was. The single cigarette left in the Lady from Hell's case had been drugged and now, the man's eyes closed and he leaned against the wall, crumpled toward the flagging. Vivian caught him, lowered him gently, so that his equipment would make no noise as he struck.

Satisfying herself that he was out and not likely to recover for some time, Vivian opened the gate. Wylie, watching from his shadowy corner saw her, saw the gesture with which she beckoned, and crossed stealthily to her side.

Together they searched along the brick wall until they found the spot they sought . . . a space where scarred and pitted bricks told their own story. This was the execution courtyard, and the spot they had found was the place where prisoners invariably stood to face a firing squad. The wall there was marked with the grooves of countless bullets.

Working in the purple darkness where each little distance isolated itself absolutely, like a man in a black cloak turning his back, Vivian carefully measured off the distance from the execution spot in the corner of the courtyard to the gateway in the wall, and then, in the narrow street outside, measured the distance again. With a piece of chalk she made a mark on the wall.

"Here," she told Wylie, "I think one row of bricks will be sufficient. Take them out, and then the bricks behind them, and I think you will have sufficient space. When you are through replace the outer bricks. No need to be careful about the replace-

ment. It will be too dark in this street for anyone passing to notice anything out of the way."

NODDING understanding, Wylie placed the large leather bag he carried on the pavement and began at the old bricks of the wall with a chisel, as Vivian turned back toward the courtyard again.

And then fate, which had been dogging their heels ever since they left Monteverde, threatened to wreck the whole elaborate structure she had created.

She stepped into the courtyard just in time to see a figure bending over the form of the guard on the flagstones. The newcomer raised his head, sprang to his feet as the sound of the opening gateway came to his ears.

"Who is it?" he demanded sharply. "Stand where you are, or I shall shoot."

Vivian halted, under her quiet all her muscles and nerves gathered together like a cat, bunched for a spring. Her own gun was in readiness. She could have shot the man down, but that would have been fatal to her plans. A shot would bring the other prison guards swarming into the courtyard. Powerful lights would be turned on . . . and their plans would be shattered, ruined irrevocably.

She saw the man, an officer by the shining bits of metal on his uniform, raising a hand toward his mouth. In another moment, she knew, he would blow his whistle, giving the alarm.

She had scarcely a split second in which to act to prevent their whole scheme from being ruined. And in that split second she acted. Her right hand, which had crept stealthily toward the neckline of her dress, was flung up and forward. The starshine touched a streak of silver in the darkness, and the knife that the Lady from Hell had flung struck its target. Even in the darkness her aim had been true. The knife plunged into the base of the man's throat, the keen blade slicing into the flesh like soft butter. The officer gurgled chokingly, his hand groped toward the deadly weapon in his throat, and he sank to the pavement.

Silence followed, silence so complete and abrupt as to give the uncanny sensation that the clatter of the man's gun as he fell had been only a queer trick of the mind.

A sibilant whisper from the gateway brought Wylie to her side. Together they moved the body of the dead officer to a little tool shed in a remote corner of the courtyard. Then, after binding and gagging the drugged warder lest he awake before the hour set for the execution, they placed him beside his officer in the shed. The bloodstains on the flagstones would not be noticed, she knew, when Cruz Delgado was marched into the yard. Attention would be concentrated on the prisoner walking to his death.

Then, locking the gate behind them, they slipped out into the silver-blue darkness of the ancient Roman street. Twenty minutes later the two straightened up. Three bricks lay at the foot of the wall, but the outer row had been replaced, and to the casual eye the wall had not been disturbed.

"Now," Vivian said softly. "Everything is in readiness. In an hour Cruz Delgado will be in our hands again . . . if there is no hitch. And once we have him I think that he will be glad to show us the hiding place of all his loot."

Wylie nodded grimly. He had seen

the Lady from Hell wring secrets from unwilling men before this, and her methods, unpleasant though they might be to her victims, were uncommonly effective.

THE dawn was killing the stars, clear and cold in tint, beneath a sky shifting in color from smoke gray to aquamarine and icy blue, when the sound of a trumpet somewhere in the prison told them that the hour for execution was at hand. The Lady from Hell, crouching with Wylie behind the ruined façade of a house across the narrow street from the execution courtyard, stirred and peered out through a crack in the board nailed across one of the windows.

They waited tensely. The zero hour was approaching. Another few moments would either see the consummation of one of the most brazen and dangerous schemes that the Lady from Hell ever attempted—or find them inside a Spanish prison, locked in—

The clang of the iron door and the sound of marching feet!

The Lady from Hell stiffened, and for a moment Wylie's eyes were caught by a glittering stare.

The showdown had come. Cruz Delgado, she knew, was being marched to his death. The sound of tramping feet, the officer's crisp commands, came clearly to her ears through the still morning air.

There was a little silence . . . eerie . . . pregnant with meaning. The world seemed to be waiting for a vast event, imminently lurking. The Lady from Hell knew that the bandage was being adjusted over Delgado's eyes, and on the moment that followed that tiny fragment of silence she knew hung the success or failure of her plot; the decision on whether they might have a chance to dip their fingers in Delgado's hoarded treasures.

The silence was shattered, and she heard the sharp command of the officer in command of the firing squad.

"Ready . . . aim . . ."

It was the instant. A swift movement of her hand pressed the button on a small black box at her feet. The sound of a thunderous explosion filled the air.

Even as the sound of the explosion came, she could see a section of the wall toppling forward into the courtyard. And, the Lady from Hell knew, beneath that section of falling wall would be standing the firing squad. She had calculated it nicely — with ruthless certainty, dooming every man of that firing squad to either death or hideous injury.

Before the dust had settled, the two criminals saw a figure scrambling over the heaped-up bricks . . . the figure of Cruz Delgado, bandit leader. He had followed the instructions she had passed on to him, hidden in the cluster of flowers, and the moment the wall had fallen, had darted for the breach in the wall before the remaining occupants of the courtyard had recovered from their astonishment.

The Lady from Hell opened the door of their hiding place and ran across the narrow street to meet him. There was a smile of grim triumph on her face as Delgado, Wylie and herself ran down the street to where a car was parked in readiness for their flight.

Cruz Delgado was the only man who knew the hiding place of the loot he had gathered during his desperate years of banditry. She had no doubt but there were methods she could utilize to persuade him to divulge that hiding place.

The Treasure *of the* Bandit Village

By Eugene Thomas

DFW SHORT NOVELETTE

Wylie's body suddenly became inert

Though the Lady from Hell Had a Huge Contraband Fortune in Her Clutches, How Did She Contrive to Get the Spanish Police to Defend Her Treasure Against the Very Bandits from Whom She Had Just Filched It?

THE motor car stopped with a jolt and a grinding of brakes. The man at the wheel pointed ahead. "It is only a little way over there," he said. "This is the end of the road—"

"So those last two miles were still what you call a road?" said Adrian Wylie.

"You are sure this is the place?" Vivian Legrand put in very suspiciously.

The man at the wheel answered without an instant's hesitation. "Of course I am sure, *señora*. This is the place. You have seen the map—"

"The map which only you can decipher."

"It is my money," said Cruz Delgado, getting out of the car. "I should know where I buried it."

"You should know. And having saved your life—for

a price — we should also know."

It was a cat and mouse game that the three notorious criminals played, and now Cruz Delgado, bandit leader known and feared throughout Spain and Portugal, believed that all the advantages lay with him.

Vivian Legrand, whom the international underworld described without exaggeration as The Lady from Hell, and "Doc" Wylie, her talented confederate, had returned to the Continent of Europe after many dangerous and thrilling adventures in South America and the Caribbean. All of them had proved to be immensely profitable, save the last one. The burning of the coasting steamer, *Esteban*, from which horror the pair had only escaped with their lives, had cost them the great fortune accumulated through their years of cunning and ruthless preying upon rich men only a shade less clever and unscrupulous than Vivian Legrand herself.

With indomitable resolve and a kind of sinister fury the Lady from Hell had at once set about repairing the ravages of that one outrageous stroke of fortune. Wylie was still suffering from the injuries he had received in the panic and tragedy of the burning *Esteban*. Vivian it was who conceived and largely executed the plot which rescued Cruz Delgado from his police captors.

Extradited from South America, the fugitive bandit chief was a man marked for execution. And not once, but twice had Vivian Legrand snatched him from the Spanish authorities,

She had permitted his recapture in Cadiz—to enlarge her chances of gain —and then had contrived to save him from the firing squad at the very moment of his long delayed execution. Defying both civil justice and martial law, she had literally exploded the process of condemning Cruz Delgado. And the bandit leader had appeared properly grateful, ready and eager to pay the agreed upon price of rescue.

In a secret place up here in the Sierra de Guadarrama the notorious bandit had hidden his loot to the total sum of seven hundred thousand *pesetas*. Upon helping him dig it up, as their reward for saving his life and restoring his freedom, Vivian and Wylie were to take half of this notable treasure.

"We can leave the car here with perfect safety," said Cruz Delgado. "Nobody in these parts would even know how to start a Renault. Not many have ever seen an automobile. You have noticed how they stare—"

"I thought perhaps they recognized you," said Vivian.

A TRIO OF "LADY FROM HELL" STORIES

"THE Treasure of the Bandit Village" is the second of a group of three LADY FROM HELL short novelettes—each complete in itself—but forming a trio of continued and related episodes. These are being presented in three successive issues of DETECTIVE FICTION WEEKLY.

Readers will be interested to know that, although the LADY FROM HELL stories are fiction, they are based on fact. The colorful adventuress of the series was the notorious blackmailer, "Babe" Carrington, who called herself "Vivian Legrand" in one or two instances, but never habitually. The famous Spanish bandit, Cruz Delgado, with whom she carries on the most reckless expedition of her entire audacious career in this episode, operated for a time in South America. It was during his extradition from that continent that these two noted personages of the criminal world first met.

"In this chauffeur's get up? Hardly. My own men wouldn't know me."

The green eyes of the Lady from Hell narrowed to thoughtful slits. "Where are your men now?" she asked.

"Alas, *señora,* they are scattered—all scattered. Some killed—some in prison—"

"And a few, I don't doubt, trying to take your place."

The Spaniard turned with easy, catlike grace. In his dark eyes there was a faint, menacing gleam. "What do you mean, *señora?*"

"MAINLY this, my friend—we're as trusting and optimistic as kids on Christmas Eve. Some of your men had to help you bring the money up here. They had to help you bury it. You later fled to South America, were detected after a time, arrested and brought back. Months, years have passed. But the treasure you are certain is all of it waiting right here, untouched."

"You are tired, *señora?* You wish to turn back?"

"No—and I'm not trying to change the subject, Cruz Delgado. Are you really leading us to the money?"

"But I owe you my life—"

"Owe is right."

"I am guiding you straight to the hiding place. You have seen my secret map."

"An excellent map, worth all of five *centavos* in the open market—"

Delgado glanced at Wylie and shrugged in masculine resignation. "The *señora* is naturally impatient. She will value my map for all it is worth when it brings us to the money—your share and my share, an even split."

"Lead on," said Adrian Wylie.

The alleged mountain road had been rocky and in stretches all but impassable, and now this indistinct mountain "path" which they were traversing on foot in single file surpassed the hardships of the road at every step.

Wylie had not as yet completely recovered from his injuries suffered aboard the flaming *Esteban.* And Cruz Delgado, after weeks of close confinement in the sort of foul dungeons Spanish prisons reserve for criminals condemned to death, was scarcely in the best athletic trim. Only Vivian pushed ahead as one virtually unaware of the difficulties they were arduously surmounting.

"How much farther?" she asked when Wylie signaled his need to pause and rest.

"Just a little way ahead—there, *señora,* beyond that sharply jutting rock—"

She estimated the distance Delgado indicated. "About a hundred yards. Come on, Doc," she urged. "You can make it."

With one of her swift, commanding gestures she relieved her partner of the spade that he had carried from the motor car. Delgado also had a spade, and a well filled haversack slung over one shoulder, containing food and wine for their refreshment.

Vivian had elected to carry a small pick, rather like the entrenching tool one day to become famous in the World War. She shouldered spade and pick together, and kept up the same dogged pace she had set for her male companions from the beginning of their curious adventure.

"Well—" She paused, her suspicions never at rest where Cruz Delgado's plan was concerned. "There's the jutting rock. Sit down, Doc—get your breath."

The liberated bandit chieftain consulted the crumpled sheet of yellowing paper which represented the famous treasure map. "Fifteen paces from that rock—" he murmured.

"In what direction?"

"North—northwest, *señora*—"

"We forgot to bring a compass, Vi," said Wylie.

"I didn't." She produced a small compass, determined the location. "There—that's north—northwest."

Delgado solemnly paced off the distance. "—thirteen—fourteen—fifteen!"

"We dig there? You're standing on solid rock."

"Patience, if you please, *señora,*" the Spanish rogue murmured gallantly.

"Don't tell me you had the cache originally prepared by a firm of surveyors?"

Delgado ignored her jeering remark, consulted his tattered map, squinted at the sun, then fell into a kind of reverie.

"Instead of blowing down that prison wall to save you, we ought to have saved enough dynamite to blow off the top of this mountain. It's rock all around here," Vivian snapped. "Why didn't you warn us that we'd need blasting powder?"

"Because, *señora,* we are going to dig between the rocks."

Delgado was pacing again, but this time he did not trouble to announce his direction, or the number of paces required to conduct him to his goal. Suddenly he paused, dramatic in his triumph. "Here—right here!"

Vivian and Wylie exchanged glances. Neither was convinced, yet neither wished to provoke immediate trouble by denouncing their Spanish ally as a cheat and double-crosser. Vivian had not studied Delgado's thoughtful pose or watched the graceful gestures of the hands. She had looked only at his feet, had noted him cautiously feeling for soft spots of earth where digging might really begin.

"Feeling better, Doc?" she said. "Let's get to work. Can't be down very deep. How deep did you say?"

"As deep as I and my two companions could make it, *señora.* I do not exactly remember—"

"That answers my question you ignored awhile back. Two companions, was it? And what happened to them after helping you hide your fortune?"

"I purposely selected old and trustworthy men. One died while I was in Brazil. The other I have heard was killed not long ago in a clash with the Civil Guard."

"Both are dead," Vivian reflected, her green eyes shallow and expressionless as jade. "And now you are trusting two more companions. I hope there's no bad luck connected with this hiding place."

Cruz Delgado, a bandit leader charged with the taking of more than twenty lives, ostentatiously crossed himself.

THE two men began their digging, but soon Vivian was hard at work beside them, wielding the light but helpful pick.

"You're sure this is the right spot, man?" Wylie demanded. "I've taken a hand at this sort of game several times before. There is no sign that this soil has been disturbed since the old earth's surface began to cool."

They were now knee deep in a short narrow trench. Vivian Legrand held the pick firmly, but from habit or instinct she also felt with her elbow for the small automatic she wore in a holster under her left armpit, its slight

bulge entirely masked by her silk blouse and loose tweed jacket.

"It is possible," said Delgado in an apologetic tone, "that I have slightly miscalculated. But only a meter or two. I am very sorry. Let me do the heavy work. I'll dig along here—"

With a fine muscular sweep of the spade he started extending the length of their shallow trench, which more than ever began to resemble a grave.

Wylie and Vivian, persuaded by his evidently revived enthusiasm, joined in to help with the new attack. Five minutes later there came another pause. The three, warmed by their exertion despite the chill morning air of the mountainside, stopped and took account of their progress.

"It is here—right here, I swear it!" Delgado exclaimed, before Vivian and Wylie could voice further skepticism. "After all—I stand to gain or lose as much by this as you folks do. It is all I have in the world. Willingly I agreed to divide with you, my rescuers. But the half I intend to keep, that also is lost until we dig and find it."

"But, we have been digging," Wylie said. "We can't scrape the topsoil off a whole range of mountains. It's nearly noon already. You're a fugitive with a big price on your head—"

Cruz Delgado's dark eyes flickered ever so slightly. The Lady from Hell, whose lifelong textbook had been Man—stupid, brutal, or heroic, dishonest, timid, cowardly, weak, lustful, sentimental, or cunning—saw on the instant that the Spaniard feared her and her partner, and, fearing, hated them both. He knew that, whether his treasurer should be uncovered or not, they held in him a form of security that tomorrow or any day thereafter could be taken to the police and exchanged for cold cash.

"We can't drive up this mountainside every day for a week, you know, without attracting too much attention," Wylie pursued. "And the going's too rough to come here after dark. It was no cinch driving here from Cadiz, sneaking and dodging—with every village policeman hoping to earn that reward by spotting the great bandit-escaper, Cruz Delgado, who'd been snatched from right under the guns of a firing squad—"

"For which miracle, you and the beautiful *señora* have earned my undying gratitude!" Delgado put in floridly.

"We don't climb mountains for that," said Vivian. She was smiling, but her eyes were cold and hard as bits of emerald.

DELGADO flung down his spade. "Come," he cried, "I am famished, and both of you must be. Let's eat and open a bottle of Manzanilla. Then I shall dig, and you shall watch me find the money buried in this secret place."

And so they joined him in preparing lunch. The haversack yielded its treasures without any groping; roast chicken, bread, olives, fruit and two bottles of wine. Delgado produced wooden plates and three metal cups. He expertly drew the cork from one of the dark bottles and poured out the Spanish wine.

"Your health, *señora*—and yours, Doctor Wylie—my two greatest friends," said the bandit. He tilted his head back with verve and abandon, appearing to drain his cup.

Vivian Legrand took a sip of the wine, a second and a third, swallowing the liquid almost without tasting or savoring it because she was tired and thirsty.

Wylie replied: "And to your health, Cruz Delgado—and to our success here today and the sharing of good fortune." He then drank deeply.

Vivian saw her partner sway drunkenly before she realized that the wine was making her dizzy. Danger threatened him. She looked at Delgado, who held the dark bottle uncertainly in his left hand, the presumably emptied cup in his right. He was staring into the cup.

"This Manzanilla," he muttered, "It's strong—"

Just then Adrian Wylie went limp all over, as though he had been caught unawares by a terrific blow on the back of the head. His cup slipped from suddenly relaxing fingers, struck musically against a projecting rock and rolled away.

"Doc!" The mere exertion of her outcry brought upon Vivian an overpowering surge of dizziness. She saw Delgado still staring into the cup, then glancing up slyly to look at her. His head and shoulders seemed to grow enormous, but then weirdly contracted to midget size.

Vivian threw down her cup, splashing the wine upon her feet and ankles. She snatched up a large slab of bread and, like a greedy child, crammed all of it into her mouth. Her throat, however, now felt strangely parched and contracted, and only unbeatable resources of will power enabled her to chew and swallow the bread.

Poison! was her thought. Cruz Delgado had brought her and Wylie to this nearly inaccessible spot in the Sierra de Guadarrama, tricked them into drinking poisoned wine—and here they would die.

By a further prodigious exertion of will she reached out to break another piece of bread from the round peasant loaf. She must lift it—an incredible burden—to her mouth, must force herself to choke it down. All around her now the bright, invigorating mountain atmosphere was turning dark.

Delgado, who obviously had drunk no wine but craftily pretended to fill and drain his cup, loomed over her dangerously, a figure vaguely seen and once again gigantic. He struck the bread from her hand. She had only swallowed a little of the wine. It must be poison. He didn't intend to risk even the crudest antidote.

Wylie had crumpled up like a figure of straw, and lay on his side in a contorted position, his breathing desperately labored. Vivian for one minute of unbearable agony continued to resist the stupefying effects of the drug.

She raised her arm heavily, pointing up at Delgado.

"You will not find your treasure—and you will not find *our* treasure—" she managed to rasp in an unnatural, high-pitched tone. Then she, too, collapsed and lost consciousness, the bright sun of noontide streaming upon the burnished helmet of her hair.

II

THE words that from instinct she had spoken to Delgado as she fell over, limp and insensible, really saved her life. The bandit had never previously thought that his alien rescuers might also possess substantial hidden funds. He had rather been disposed to believe that Vivian Legrand and Wylie were badly in need of money—as, in fact, they were.

Their great accumulation of cash and securities had been lost with the burning of the Monteverdian steamer *Esteban*. And a fat money-belt which Vivian had ruthlessly extorted from Miguel, the half crazed skipper of that

doomed ship, had afterward been stolen. Except for the few thousand *pesetas* thus far gained from her individual exploits in twice separating the Spanish authorities from their prize captive, Cruz Delgado, the once wealthy Lady from Hell was flat broke. Wylie shared that uncomfortable condition, and was, moreover, still handicapped by a slow convalescence from his physical injuries.

Delgado, the ingrate, who feared and therefore hated his rescuers, had not poisoned them. He had given them a powerful narcotic, obtained from a former confederate of the underworld to whom he had surreptitiously applied when passing through Toledo on their flight from Cadiz.

It had been easy to open one of the bottles of wine, put in the drug, mark and recork the bottle in such a way that it seemed not to have been tampered with. Cruz Delgado congratulated himself with Latin fervor in being able to outwit such formidable plotters as Vivian Legrand and Wylie.

It had even proved a simple stratagem to pretend to fill his cup and seem to empty it at a gulp with both of them observing him. That, the key to his whole malignant project, had passed off very naturally. But now—intrigued by Vivian's words, "and you will not find *our* treasure"—the bandit was recklessly engaged in ruining his well laid plan.

First he searched the pockets of both of his helpless adversaries. And he found coins and currency, a few hundred *pesetas,* residue of the sum he had originally paid them after deduction of their expenses on the furtive journey from Cadiz, minor bribes, hiring the motor car, and sundries. Wylie carried in his wallet bank receipts—London, Paris, Amsterdam, Brussels—showing that he and Vivian had upward of four hundred pounds at their disposal in the various European cities. Delgado pocketed these, believing he would be able to dispose of them at a heavy discount in the underworld of Spain.

But they hardly would call four hundred pounds a treasure. What else had they hidden and where?

Delgado, supposing that he had plenty of time, even picked his way down the slope till he came to the spot where they had left the Renault. Vivian and Wylie each had a bag in the car. He ransacked them both. Vivian's contained only apparel and a box of ammunition for a .25 Colt automatic. She must have such a gun on her, Delgado decided, and reminded himself to search for it when he returned to finish off his little chore of homicide.

Wylie's bag contained several kinds of paper and inks, also a variety of pens. The bandit found a copy of his own fake "treasure" map so perfectly devised that he couldn't be sure which was the original counterfeit.

SO they had borrowed from him while he slept, and had thought to make sure that he did not trick them. But he had tricked them! He showed his strong white teeth in a wolfish grin. His money lay safely hidden a good distance to the north, far from this isolated section of the Sierra de Guadarrama. He would leave them here, and proceed at his leisure to secure the prize exclusively for himself.

Cruz Delgado had become a notoriously successful bandit leader because he could endure no rivalry, no equals. He had a dictator's temperament, and only worked with followers who obeyed him like serfs. Even when feeling his earliest pangs of gratitude as

Vivian Legrand, only slightly assisted by the convalescent Wylie, rescued him from certain execution, Delgado had resented taking orders from the dazzling red haired woman.

He disliked her alien condescension, her all too evident mental superiority. He had loathed being helped and saved, had hated dependence upon the pair, and dreaded and despised them for being able to hold over him the power of life and death. They had thought they could demand a half share of all his hidden loot, had they?

What a pity they were unconscious and would remain so to the end—unable to realize how completely he had triumphed. Delgado continued searching the car until he was sure nothing had escaped his attention. If any paper or document existed, locating such "treasure" of theirs as Vivian had mentioned, it must be hidden on one of them.

The despicable criminal again trudged up the mountainside, resolved to strip and search both his victims. He jumped a small, brawling mountain brook—and that gave him a new idea. Why not bind the pair securely, bring them to by plunging them into this chilling water, torture one or both till the secret of the "treasure" had been disgorged? Then leave them to perish—

These solacing cogitations were abruptly checked as Cruz Delgado's keen eyes swept the valley below. A moving cloud of dust! A party of horsemen riding two and two! Sun glinting upon uniforms and equipment—

Mounted police, a squad of the Civil Guard, dangerously near and coming this way!

There were many paths they might take. But if they did not turn off, if they discovered the unoccupied motor car, and then scaled the mountainside to surround and surprise him—he would have a battle on his hands. He was armed only with knife and revolver, while they would have Lebel guns or Mannlicher carbines. And he had a price on his head!

Delgado covered the rest of the distance with the speed and agility of a mountain sheep. He found Vivian Legrand and Wylie lying just as he had left them. The drug had been powerful, indeed; and Wylie, who had swallowed twice as much as his partner, was barely alive.

Far away still was the little cloud of dust, but the armed horsemen, though taking it easy and not pressing their mounts, were inexorably following the alleged road that would bring them to the telltale Renault.

No time, then, for further searching of his victims, no time to try to revive them, or torture them and gloat over their alien despair. Cruz Delgado was too conceited to admit he feared the police. Yet he nourished an abiding distaste for noisome Spanish dungeons and an aching desire never again to face a firing squad or any other type of executioner. It may even have struck him with a twinge of whatever atrophied conscience the desperado owned that he was engaged in destroying the very people who had been able twice to save him.

In his haste he even forgot about hunting for Vivian's small automatic.

THE Lady from Hell, who had sunk so perilously close to some encounter with eternity, revived with the strangest sensation she was ever to experience. Something pattered upon her body, upon her face. Then something heavier struck her sharply and painfully—it was a sliver of rock.

A peculiar grating sound rasped upon her still half benumbed senses. The sound of a spade—

Vivian opened her lips and found them abominable and gritty. She opened her eyes, but cautiously and only peered through narrowed slits.

Her inward ejaculation was an emotional earthquake, but actually she made no sound. Horror of an electric, galvanizing sort, altogether new to one of her nerve and poise, quickened her brain.

Cruz Delgado was burying her alive.

She found herself lying face up in the shallow trench they had dug. Small quantities of earth and stones had already been thrown upon her. The spade had stopped scraping, however. What was he up to? And what should she do?

If her recovery of consciousness was revealed to him, fear and desperation would inspire the monster to split her skull with his handiest weapon —the spade—before she could so much as raise a hand.

It was fortunate that he had thrown her on her back. Face down, she could hardly have turned over without warning him—would, in fact, have already begun to smother.

What *was* he doing? The icy horror of her predicament was too much even for her steel-fibered nerves. Her impulse to scream—a fatal impulse—was so nearly overpowering, she bit hard on the dirt and grit clinging to her lips. And the very human distaste for such substances served as a brake on her throat which ached to yell.

Delgado, whom she could not see over the rim of her impromptu grave, was now making another scraping sound, but this time not with the spade. Vivian suddenly guessed it: she lay on a hard, rough surface—Delgado had paid her the compliment of trying to bury her deep—and now he was dragging closer and closer the limp form of Adrian Wylie, meaning to bury him in the same grave.

As the sound came nearer, Vivian dared to move a little. She used her left elbow to press her side. It was still there, her ever useful little "rescuers," the concealed automatic she wore strapped tight underneath her blouse. She tried her right arm. It throbbed and seemed to have been cruelly twisted, yet responded painfully—wrist, elbow and shoulder.

Such a brief, vital gesture would be necessary, her life, as often before, to be staked upon that sudden, swift flexing of elbow and wrist. She kept her eyes closed till the last split-second, meanwhile straining to hear. If she opened her eyes and the dirt on her face sifted in, no instinct of self-control would be strong enough to stop her moving one hand quickly to try to ease that unbearable irritation.

The moment of crisis, she could tell, was all but upon her.

She ventured at last to look up, squinting one eye and seeing but indistinctly. Delgado's head and shoulders were visible. His face was turned away. He stepped closer, twisting half around, arms extending downward.

One of Wylie's feet slid gruesomely over the rim of the grave. Vivian's right hand was stirring, creeping toward her left armpit. Wylie's other foot became visible, his knees—

Delgado was turning, leaning forward directly over her now, to swing the inert body into position, Wylie's head at her feet. Vivian's right hand completed its stealthy journey, then flashed up.

The small automatic barked twice.

Two round dark holes appeared miraculously one above, one below the right eye of Cruz Delgado. He lurched forward, releasing his grip upon the slack form of Adrian Wylie, which slumped awkwardly across the narrow opening of the trench, half sagging into it.

Delgado, dead before he hit the ground, lay asprawl close beside him. This curious, ghastly canopy seemed to pin Vivian Legrand into the space that had come so near to being her brave. And after the masterly exertion with which she had willed herself to aim accurately and shoot swiftly, it took her nearly ten minutes to summon new strength to lift Wylie gently aside, thrust Delgado's corpse out of the way and scramble out of the trench.

Wylie she discovered very faintly breathing. It wasn't safe to give him wine from the unopened bottle. Delgado might have drugged them both; but she briskly knocked the neck off that bottle and showered its alcoholic contents upon his face and head. She exercised her stricken partner's arms and chafed his wrists with a perceptibly stimulating effect. Color came gradually back into his pallid countenance.

Since she herself had not been poisoned, but only knocked out with a powerful drug, it must be that nothing more serious had overtaken him. He had, however, swallowed more of the doctored wine and, in his still weakened condition, had been almost instantly bowled over by that potent draught.

AS soon as Wylie began to stir and Vivian saw that he was going to revive, she gave some attention to Cruz Delgado. That monster of ingratitude and remorseless cunning was dead, very dead. Vivian still had dirt and grit in her hair, on her face, all over her clothes to remind her that it was no nightmare, Delgado had actually been burying her alive when she shot him.

Intrepid as she was, the thought still made her shudder. Centuries ago men and women had been sentenced to be entombed alive for religious or political offences; and even in those barbarous times burning at the stake had been preferred as punishment.

Vivian used some of the wine remaining from the second bottle to cleanse her face and hands as best she could. There was the mountain brook she remembered no great way off, but she didn't want to venture that far away from Adrian Wylie until he had fully recovered his senses.

Realizing that their expedition to this isolated spot had been only Delgado's special scheme for ridding himself of oppressive benefactors, Vivian now began searching for some clue to the actual hiding place of the loot.

Since he had sought to cheat and destroy them with a faked map, it seemed probable that there really existed a map disclosing his treasure's place and manner of concealment.

The Lady from Hell, given this new and promising objective, quickly regained much of her natural vigor, resource and assurance. She still treated Delgado and his possessions a bit gingerly, yet within a few minutes she discovered that the handle of a knife he carried tucked inside his belt could be loosened and unscrewed.

The handle proved to be hollow, providing a small compartment in which Vivian discovered a tightly folded sheet of tough linen paper.

Spread out it was about nine inches square. Traced in pale green ink on its glossy surface was what appeared to be the ground plan of a house.

"This must be it," Vi said to herself, adding: "Doc will know how to locate the house if these marks give any location."

Her absorbing study was interrupted when she heard Wylie groan. He was just coming to, and she hastened to aid him.

"Just lie still. I'll get some water from the brook we crossed climbing up here. Nothing to worry about, Doc. When you're quite yourself, I'll tell you what has happened—"

SHE carried away the three metal drinking cups and, for want of any other container, Wylie's fine American felt hat. Kneeling beside the running water, she very carefully rinsed the two cups into which Delgado had poured the drugged wine. His own cup had never been touched by the wine, and so it would be safe for Wylie to drink from that. Before risking it, however, she used the cup herself.

It tasted all right. The clear, cold mountain spring water immensely refreshing. With her various containers brimming she started up to climb back to the sheltered ledge where she had left her reviving partner.

But what was happening below in the valley?

Instinctively crouching to hide from possible enemies, Vivian Legrand descried the party of mounted men, now halted at the termination of the alleged mountain road, at the place where they had left their motor car.

Spanish gendarmes — the Civil Guard! Investigating!

She must return to Adrian Wylie as swiftly as possible, making haste without stumbling on the rocky incline and spilling her cargo of water from the brook. Somehow she managed this, though still feeling the powerful effects of the narcotic Delgado had put in their wine. At one treacherous point of the uncertain path a racking wave of dizziness all but overcame her.

She shut her eyes and stood perfectly still. Then, bending down, with the cups and hat on a convenient boulder, she splashed water in her own face till she could convince herself that she was all right again. Reaching Wylie with a stifled sob of relief, she sank down beside him, encouraging, restoring and warning him almost in one breath.

"The police are bound to come up here and find us. How do I look, doc? Delgado came at me after knocking you out — and I shot him. How's that?"

"Vi, you look as though a whole mountain—a volcano had attacked you," he whispered hoarsely.

Then in an agony of mind renewed by her awful recollection, she revealed how the bandit had planned to get rid of them, how he had actually been burying them alive—

"Tell me the rest some other time, Vi," said Adrian Wylie. He took hold of her firm, slender right hand and squeezed it with surprising strength. "Thank God for that steady hand!"

"And for you making me learn to shoot, years ago in Manila."

III

EVEN soiled and disheveled as she was, Vivian Legrand made a striking and unforgettable picture as she knelt beside Adrian Wylie, and turned, still kneeling, to face the Spanish police officers. A jutting ledge of rock cast a broad, blue-gray shadow which protected them from the glare of the afternoon

sun. Vivian's work as a ministering angel was only too apparent. She was never the Lady from Hell when it came to looking after the shrewd, loyal, accomplished man who had been her partner in crime through thick and thin for many years. The Spaniards were astonished and instantly impressed.

Both she and Wylie spoke Spanish fluently. Had he not posed as the Dictator of the Republic of Monteverde?

"The Civil Guard!" Vivian exclaimed. "Oh, thank God, Captain, that you and your men have found us!"

"*Señora*, what has happened?"

"You heard my shots?"

"*Shots!* No, *señora*—were you signaling?"

"I have been in desperate danger," said Vivian, her lovely oval face lifted appealingly. She told her name and that of her stricken companion—Doctor Adrian Wylie.

"We were miles away," said the Spanish Guard captain. "But a report reached us of the passing of your motor car. That is no very common occurrence in this part of the country. It had to be investigated."

"It was the idea of our chauffeur," Vivian explained in her easily simulated tones of semi-hysteria. "He suggested that we come here—"

"But why?"

"He told us that he knew where an old Spanish treasure is hidden. If we would finance him—come here and help him look for it—" She broke off with a desperate sob. Nor was all of this acting. Spells of dizziness still afflicted her; the drug in the wine had been potent, indeed, and it would be hours before its complete effect wore off.

"*Señora*—I regret to say it against my own countrymen, but the 'Spanish Treasure' is as old a fraud as the 'Spanish prisoner' of which you must have heard."

"Captain, this was more than fraud. He—he tried to kill us!"

"And escaped when you fired the shots calling for help?"

Vivian Legrand was now a pitiable sight, the utmost manifestation of beauty in distress. "I fired the shots to defend myself, Captain—I was so desperately afraid. And I killed him—"

"Here—see here, sir!" One of the police officers had found the body of Cruz Delgado, lying face downward in the trench.

His chauffeur's uniform and the mask of blood and dirt caking his face deceived them for several minutes. Then one of the policemen recognized the notorious bandit.

"It is Cruz Delgado all right," the commanding officer agreed.

"Who?" asked Vivian.

She listened with eagerness and wonder as the bandit's identity and merciless career of crime were related to her and Adrian Wylie. On hearing how he had just recently been rescued from the firing squad in the jail yard at Cadiz, Vivian asked several innocent-sounding questions. Thus she acquired important information: no description of Delgado's accomplices which resembled either Wylie or herself had been spread broadcast to warn the police.

"There is a large reward offered for this rogue, dead or alive, *señora*," said the police captain. "All Spain today is indebted to you. Our government will be happy to present the reward to so beautiful and brave a lady."

"And I shall insist on sharing it with the police," she replied. "Doctor Wylie and I will accept part of the money because Delgado has robbed us, too. We don't want to be left stranded. But I count on you as an officer and gentleman to see to it that the police are given public credit for—for disposing of Cruz Delgado. I dislike publicity—pictures in the newspapers. And I couldn't go on living, Captain, if I had become notorious as the woman who shot and killed a celebrated criminal and murderer."

The officer clicked his heels and bowed very gallantly.

"I quite understand your scruples in this, *señora*. It shall, of course, be as you wish. Only my superior officers, a few heads of the government, perhaps King Alfonso himself, will need to see my confidential report and know the truth of this matter."

HE was smiling very happily, and Vivian knew she had struck the right note and could depend upon him absolutely. It probably meant promotion for him, sums of money for his troopers. And she and Wylie would not be harassed by an avalanche of international publicity, so dangerous to a pair with their past lingering behind them.

The young gendarme captain—whose name, he said, was Rafael de Vargas—thus became one more police official caught by the spell of Vivian Legrand's incomparable enchantments. "*Señora*, you are not only beautiful and generous," he exclaimed, "but a truly astounding pistol shot."

"It was dreadful to have to shoot to kill, even in self-defense," sighed the Lady from Hell. "I have practiced firing at a target, of course. But, Captain, I was too frightened to remember any of the rules—just pointed the gun, shut my eyes, and pressed the trigger."

And Cruz Delgado, as the simplest autopsy would prove, had been killed instantly by a brain shot.

Captain de Vargas ordered his men to fetch a blanket and wrap it around the bandit's body before they began moving it down the slope to the motor car. Adrian Wylie, feeling much stronger now and with his physician's pose to maintain, went over to examine Delgado's fatal wounds.

Later he said to Vivian, aside: "Lying flat on your back, half stupefied from the drug—with dirt sifting into y o u r eyes! Vi, it's unbelievable—"

"Delgado's face was all the target I had," she shrugged.

She had been careful to conceal the fascinating, though as yet undeciphered, drawing which she had discovered in the hollow handle of the master bandit's knife. However, she very ostentatiously consulted young de Vargas about the other map, alleged to reveal buried treasure, with which Delgado had lured her and Wylie to this remote mountainside.

"It is plainly a fake. I patrol this district with my men, and know every rod of it," said the captain. "But how could you be so sure it was not genuine? Delgado was cruel and murderous, but also, when he wanted to be, cunning, polite, persuasive. It was characteristic of him to escape from the region of Cadiz, break through our tight police cordon, by g e t t i n g you people — respectable foreign tourists—to hire him as your chauffeur.

"And any other crook but Delgado would have felt grateful to you for all unwittingly covering his flight. But he

was immune to every decent emotion. Having imposed on you and Doctor Wylie, he could only think of continuing to prey on you. And when you began to suspect his treachery, he prepared to murder you."

"The fellow was so plausible and efficient, we were completely taken in," said Wylie, playing the embarrassed foreigner and novice traveler.

AN hour later they set out for Madrid, enjoying the compliment and protection of a police escort all the way. This considerate treatment at first made Vivian uneasy.

"You don't suppose that they really suspect us in connection with Cruz Delgado's escape?" she asked Wylie in a hushed tone. "Some of the firing squad were killed when that wall was blown down. We're accessories to homicide and heaven knows what else—"

"Forget it! De Vargas admires you too much to lend himself to a scheme meant to trap you, Vi. This escort business does us honor as visiting foreigners. And don't think they aren't grateful to a visitor who has rid them of Cruz Delgado. Your saying to give the police all the credit was a masterstroke."

Madrid's newspapers lavished acclaim upon the provincial police when it was announced that Cruz Delgado had been trapped in a mountain retreat and shot dead resisting arrest. Rafael de Vargas was promoted to the rank of lieutenant-colonel. But General Count Morales, head of the Spanish police, came to call upon Vivian and Wylie at their hotel in the capital. He was accompanied by a handsome colonel of the army staff, who proved to be an equerry of the King.

Morales said he wished to negotiate fairly the division of the 10,000 *pesetas* reward which the government had posted for Cruz Delgado, "dead or alive." After the Count had studied Vivian's beauty for a few minutes, he acquired the thought that this negotiation of the reward's fair distribution would have to be a pretty protracted affair. Two luncheons at the finest cafés of Madrid and a private little dinner party followed. Vivian Legrand and Wylie now as friends at Court. They also came into possession of 4,000 *pesetas* of the promised reward, a welcome gain since they had spent all the money originally derived from rescuing Delgado.

"But four thousand won't last long," Vivian said to Wylie. "I already owe fifteen hundred for my new clothes. It costs money to go about with people like Morales—"

"Money which I've no doubt the Count has offered to provide."

"Certainly. The Count — and others. But," she snapped, "that's never been our game. And even the romantic atmosphere of old Spain isn't likely to change me. Let's get busy and figure out that drawing I took from Cruz Delgado's knife handle."

"I have already deciphered it," her partner grinned.

"Then, good Lord, why not tell me? We stay here, fretting over a paltry four thousand *pesetas,* and you hold the key to a treasure of more than half a million."

Wylie frowned, his expression worried and obstinate. "I didn't tell you, Vi, because I knew you'd want to try to go after Delgado's secret hoard. I'm not yet fit to help you much—and it's just too damned dangerous for you alone."

A deep light had leaped into the

greenish eyes of the woman confronting him. "We've had our rules for years, Doc," she reminded him, "and have never seriously quarreled—"

"Because I let you be the boss."

"I'm still boss. It's always been understood that each of us is to be the only judge of the sort of risk he'll run." She paused and her face, which could on occasion be sinister, cruel and hard, was warmly gracious and persuasive. "Tell me what you have deciphered, and I'll figure how we are to bag the treasure. Doesn't Cruz Delgado owe me something? He tried to bury me alive. And I'll die that death in nightmares for years to come."

THE drawing found in Delgado's hollow knife handle, according to the clever interpretation of Adrian Wylie, located a house in the village of Zucorra,* a small place much avoided by travelers, in northwestern Spain. And the reason people tried not to pass through Zucorra, said Wylie, was its natives' addiction to banditry.

"But there was only the house in the drawing," Vivian objected. "How do you know the house is in Zucorra?"

"Code writing on the margin of the sheet. Zucorra is widely known as 'the bandit village.' An honest, law-abiding citizen is as rare in Zucorra as an atheist at morning prayers. Delgado and all his family spring from the vicinity of Zucorra. It's not surprising that he chose to hide his criminal profits there. But it will be remarkable if he hid the money so well that no neighborly robber has been able to uncover it."

"I'll go to Zucorra and find out."

An argument ensued, but Vivian won it.

"Then," Wylie declared, "if you go—I go. I'm feeling better from hour to hour, Vi. And we've got to stick together."

"But I need you here. That's part of my plan. You wait right here and don't worry until you get a message from me. It'll be marked 'Monteverde' somewhere, to tell you I'm all right and that what I've written for you is on the level," In a swift, enthusiastic undertone the Lady from Hell outlined to him further details of her impromptu and highly original enterprise.

On the following day, therefore—much to the surprise and regret of her new, distinguished friends in Madrid—she left her hotel unexpectedly and was seen no more in the fashionable resorts of the capital. But there were other, less notable Spaniards who were less surprised by her going. And to them, at least, she did not disappear. They were having her shadowed.

Now at that time the police and the underworld of Spain were not any different in their complex relations than the police and criminal elements of other Continental countries. There were stool pigeons who gave information to the Civil Guard; and there were policemen who maintained such useful connections by passing tips back to the underworld.

One of the young de Vargas' troopers had spent his share of the cash reward unwisely. A pretty girl had got him drunk and got him talking, and from that pretty girl had spread the engrossing rumor that not the police but a beautiful red haired foreign lady had shot and killed Cruz Delgado. As Delgado's conquests were a lively part of his legend, and

** A Fictitious Name.*

as romance scents the very air of Spain which is not always otherwise agreeably fragrant, Spaniards of both sexes having contact with the world of crime took it for granted that Vivian Legrand had killed the bandit in a jealous rage.

Perhaps, whispered the underworld, this woman now knows where to look for the fortune that Delgado was supposed to have accumulated and hidden. Watch her closely, whispered the more furtive subjects of Alfonso, and we shall know what she knows.

VIVIAN left the fine Renault in Valladolid and proceeded into the province of León on horseback. She could afford to allow the natives of Zucorra to steal a horse, but hardly an imported motor car. The man who was guiding her had been recommended by a villainous-looking innkeeper as "absolutely trustworthy." Vivian felt sure that the guide, who was also villainous looking, could be depended upon to head her straight into trouble. For that was the plan of the Lady from Hell. The people of Zucorra were thieves and bandits who preyed upon innocent wayfarers — very well, she would arrange to stray into their danger zone, permit them to prey upon her, and locate the hidden wealth of the late Cruz Delgado.

Vivian's first shock of surprise came when she mentioned her real destination to the guide provided by the innkeeper of Ponferrada. "I want to visit Zucorra. One of the strangest villages in all Spain, so I have heard," she prattled. "I am an author and I have to seek out the unusual—"

"We not go near Zucorra," said the guide.

"But I insist. I have hired you. What's the matter with Zucorra—a lovely place, I am told, with such a splendid view of the Cantabrian Mountains—"

"Nobody goes to Zucorra for the view," he growled.

"Then my book will be all the more original—"

Vivian could play the fluttering, gushing lady tourist to perfection. But her keen eyes were noting every movement of the surly brute, her hired guide, who might become an enemy. Why was his hand fidgetting nervously there at his waistband? A knife?

"On to Zucorra," said the Lady from Hell.

The man instead dismounted and stalked sullenly toward her. Obviously he had decided to terminate their journey here and now, for his own convenience and profit. Obviously he was armed, a knife—and revolver too, perhaps—"

The small automatic that had dictated a well-spaced colon to end the evil life of Cruz Delgade came sliding from its armpit holster and lay at ease in the palm of Vivian's firm, slender hand.

She had chosen just the right second to draw. For the ugly guide's knife was half out—he could not retract his menacing gesture, nor had he time to swing back his arm and try to hurl the glittering blade.

"Put up your hands, you dog! Drop that knife!"

The knife clattered upon the rutted, pebbly road. Malice gleamed in the cold green eyes of the Lady from Hell. It was overlong since her power to dominate men by force had been tested. She had found the coquetry of high life in Madrid a little cloying. Her appetite for sudden, violent measures had regularly to be appeased.

"Just to give you an idea of what a clown you are," she promised, and fired one shot from the weapon she aimed with such seeming nonchalance.

Her erstwhile guide yelped in pain and fell to his knees, pleading for mercy. A small dark hole punctured the very center of his right hand.

"No wonder *you* are afraid of the people of Zucorra," she jeered. "Run whimpering back to Ponferrada. And show our friend, the innkeeper, how promptly I pay for faithful services."

IV

IT was after midnight when Vivian Legrand drew rein in the sleepy village of Zucorra, bent upon carrying out alone the most reckless expedition of her whole audacious and devious career. The large stone dwelling which she sought was plainly discernible by moonlight, for no other building on the single street of the community resembled it or matched the sketch which Wylie had devised after closely studying Delgado's plan.

Vivian dared to ride the length of the village street, then wheel her mount and return to the house whose looming outline engaged her. She raised her voice and called, called again — the musical tone echoing weirdly among the darkened abodes of people whose reputation was the worst in northern Spain.

Their discovery, from the sound of her voice, that this extraordinary nocturnal invader was a woman must have roused the whole village. Heavy shutters parted, and a man's head and shoulders were visible in the frame of an open window directly above her head.

"What do you want?"

"Is this an inn?" she questioned.

"This is Zucorra," he answered cryptically, as though his conscience, or some rule of sportmanship, required that every potential victim be warned at least once.

"I know that," Vivian called back cheerfully. "I lost my way on the road from Ponferrada. I can ride no farther. I'll pay you well to put me up for the night, and take care of my horse."

"How much will you pay me?" he growled. But the Lady from Hell who habitually played with men, thought she detected an accent of sardonic humor in his query.

"Don't keep me out here haggling with you, man. It's late," she snapped. "I can pay whatever you charge—"

"That's a bargain, then," he chuckled grimly, and pulled the stout shutters to with a slam.

Presently the door swung wide, lights gleamed and there was a poor imitation of the country inn's hospitable bustle. Vivian dismounted. A sleepy, shambling youth took care of her horse. Her host, with whom she had dickered, proved to be a powerfully built and rather handsome man of uncertain age but decidedly formidable aspect.

"I can only offer you bread and wine as refreshment," he explained. His tone and manner were truculent until Vivian Legrand stepped into the lighted room. She heard him catch his breath, and murmur something that sounded like a religious phrase or prayer.

Had the tales of "wicked" Zucorra really been exaggerated? Were its people like most other villages of Spain — law-abiding, devout, impoverished and genial?

The man was staring—staring—as though he had never seen such dazzling beauty before. Well, Vivian

was wholly accustomed to public admiration. Her face, her hair, her exquisite figure had caused a considerable stir of late in the fashionable restaurants and theaters of Madrid.

But her host still stared. His eyes were veiled and guarded, but his hands—Vivian looked at his hands, and knew that she had encountered all and more than her restless spirit of adventure had anticipated.

"Bread and wine will be welcome enough," she said.

Her host turned, and the lamplight carved out his face in a profile of bronze. Vivian, who had thought to be prepared for anything, was not quite prepared for this. The big man confronting her, the man who even now was striding across the room and noisily bolting the door—the man was the father of Cruz Delgado.

His striking resemblance to the bandit leader she had killed but a fortnight ago could only be explained by the closest relationship. And why had he murmured that thankful phrase of prayer when he saw her?

VIVIAN tried to speak casually. "I am really very tired, *señor*. If you will show me to my room, I think I'll not wait for the bread or the wine. I'm really not hungry, and I need nothing to make me sleep."

"This way, then," said her host. "We have few comforts here. But whatever I have is yours to command, *señora*." He turned aside, and she could not see his face, but his hands—the hands she had been watching—were still clinched and straining, like those of an infuriated man who burns to strike crushing blows. "No one who has ever come to my house has been so welcome as you," he murmured politely.

In a bleak and barely furnished room Vivian Legrand ached to lie down and fall into dreamless sleep, but not for a moment could she dare relax her vigilance. Wylie had been right—this was the maddest of her schemes for acquiring large sums of money. Self-assured as she usually was, she found herself wishing very honestly for Adrian Wylie's aid at this critical turn of events.

Why hadn't it occurred to them that Cruz Delgado's drawing was a plan of his father's house and that, if his fortune were hidden anywhere, it would lie close to that thick walled and frowning ancestral hold?

Vivian put out her light, which was not a peasant's candle but an oil lamp of bourgeois affluence. She tugged at several articles of furniture in the room, hoping to barricade her door securely enough to permit her to get a little rest. But every move she made seemed to raise an alarming sound; and as it was never her policy to let an opponent think her afraid, she abandoned an effort which was bound to inform the household that she was blockading the entrance to her bedroom.

An hour passed. Zucorra had relapsed into a complete and stifling stillness. Vivian paced the floor, sat in deliberately cramped and awkward positions, did everything she could to dissipate the enveloping cloud of her extreme fatigue.

Suddenly she heard a curious scratching sound—it came again—and, holding her gun ready, she walked to the door which boasted a latch but no bolt, and opened it cautiously.

"*Señora*, if you p l e a s e—" A hoarsely croaking feminine voice begged admittance. Vivian could

dimly descry a small, stooped figure and a hawk-like face with large, blazing eyes. And when she opened her door wider, the visitor drifted into the room as silently and easily as smoke.

"Well?" said Vivian, shutting her door and projecting more hostility than she felt. Indeed, this intrusion, whatever its object, was a welcome relief from her struggle against weariness. "Why do you disturb me?"

"The *señora* has not slept, that is good. I only disturb the *señora* to save her life," she added with husky caution. "You are in the house of your bitter enemies, *señora.*"

"Cruz Delgado's house—"

"He is dead. It was you who killed him."

"Who spread such a lie?"

"We live remotely, *señora,* but by secret channels have news from Madrid every day of our lives. Did you think the police would keep your secret?"

"Who are you, and why are you telling me this?" Vivian demanded. She had not returned her automatic to its holster, handy though that always was.

"I am the mother of Cruz Delgado," said the woman.

"And you hate whoever killed him?"

"Cruz was a very bad man. He deserved death. I am only sorry that you had to kill him, *señora*—for his father, my husband, hates you and intends to take revenge."

Vivian's thoughts were racing. "If I had killed your son, would I come here to brag about it?"

"Not to brag, *señora*—not to brag—"

"What then?"

"You will not be killed until my husband knows the answer to that, *señora.* And I must warn you, he will torture you horribly to make you tell him all of the truth. We are uncivilized, you see, in this part of Spain. I was not always bent like this—and I am not as old as you must think me."

Vivian saw her opening and instantly seized it. "Then he has tortured you, *señora?*" she said with winning sympathy and respect.

"Let us not speak of it—"

"You must hate him sometimes."

"I hate him at all times," the visitor said evenly.

"That is why you have come to warn me?"

"Hardly to warn—what use would a warning be to you, a woman alone, here in Zucorra?"

"To bargain then?"

"Perhaps. Will you tell me, *señora,* why you came alone and at night to the house of Cruz Delgado's father?"

Vivian played a trump with her customary blandness. "It may be since you get both news from Madrid and from the underworld of Spain," said she, "that you have heard of me. You are the mother of the famous bandit, Cruz Delgado. And I am known in many quarters of the world as—the Lady from Hell."

"Then you really did kill him?" the dead bandit's mother questioned immediately.

"For betraying me and trying to trick me, yes. But it was also I who rescued him from the firing squad in Cadiz."

"We have heard of that too. You are a strange and daring young woman, and beautiful as well. You ought not to die."

"I assure you I don't intend to," said Vivian. "Will you mind very much if I make you a widow, *señora?*"

FOR three hours Vivian Legrand slept as peacefully as a small and trusting child. The mother of Cruz Delgado kept watch.

Their uncommon alliance, negotiated in whispers and symbolized by clasping hands in the dismal, shadowy room, was all the help which Vivian believed she would need. The vengeance of Cruz Delgado's father must be frustrated—by standing siege in this room, if need be—for at least a day. The older woman promised to provide an adequate supply of food and drink. Meanwhile an urgent message to Adrian Wylie in Madrid was to be privately dispatched by means of those same secret channels which brought Zucorra, the "bandit village" its regular underground relays of news.

And what had Vivian promised in return?

"You were his mother, while I—I once loved him very deeply," she had lied. "Cruz betrayed me, and in a quarrel I shot him. But we had trusted each other, and after I saved him from execution in Cadiz, he gave me a map showing where his treasure is hidden. You will come with me, and we'll divide that fortune, share and share alike."

Upon which promise the league against the vengeful Tomás Delgado, father of the dead bandit had been founded.

But it all came to nought at the end of three hours. Dawn was breaking when the first rifle shot awakened Vivian.

"What is that?" she exclaimed.

"Some of my husband's enemies," Señora Delgado answered calmly.

"From outside the village?"

"And neighbors within the village. Cruz made us envied at first, but afterward, terribly unpopular. When he fled to South America, that time, deserting his comrades, many of them—young fellows from this vicinity—were captured, and either executed or sentenced to prison for life. It became the general belief that Cruz had done this deliberately—betrayed his own band—in order to satisfy the authorities, make the hunt for him less severe—and to keep all the band's treasure eventually for his own use."

Other rifle shots sounded outside in the village street.

"Does this often happen? An armed attack—"

The mother of Cruz Delgado gestured anxiously. "No—until this morning, only threats. But this, I think, *señora,* is on your account. It was heard—what you said last night, that you can pay whatever my husband would charge.

"It is supposed, then, that he is holding you, a rich lady, for ransom. And our neighbors do not intend to submit to that."

"Some of them are afraid of the police?"

"No, but all of them are afraid of losing their promised share of your ransom."

Vivian went to a window and gently parted the shutters a few inches to peer out. Other rifles banged away, and two heavy slugs thudded into the stout shutters, causing her instantly to close them. She hesitated now, for only a spread of seconds, deciding what to do. Then she abruptly produced a copy of Cruz Delgado's drawing which Wylie had deciphered for her.

"Do you see those lines—do you recognize what this means?"

She and the mother of the dead bandit leader bent over the plan Cruz had kept exclusively to himself.

"Then his money is hidden in this very house?"

"So it seems—"

"Come," said the woman, "what is money to us at present? This drawing that my wicked son made will serve one good purpose. It will show us where we can hide, *señora,* and perhaps save both our lives. Come!"

THE battle of Zucorra, as it became known in Spanish police history, lasted throughout the day. Tomás Delgado was not without influence or local partisans. Neighbors might snipe his home to force him to share with them his lucrative opportunity as an "innkeeper," but as soon as he and his followers began fighting back and blood was shed, a serious outbreak of vindictive clan warfare developed.

Guided by her captor's wife, Vivian made her way to the secret sub-cellar compartment which the drawing found in the hollow knife handle had revealed. There they waited, conversing in low tones, seated upon a small oaken chest which held the accumulated "earnings" of the most despicable bandit of modern Spain.

Other events proceeded, but the women in hiding knew nothing about them. Uneasily waiting in Madrid, Wylie had decided that for once he must disobey his partner's explicit orders. He had therefore appealed to their good friend, Lieutenant-Colonel Rafael de Vargas of the Civil Guard, telling him a cooked-up yarn which explained Vivian's restless notion of exploring Zucorra, but did not mention Cruz Delgado's hidden riches.

"Zucorra!" cried de Vargas, springing to his feet. "We must go after her, Doctor. The ruffians of that place will hold her for ransom—at the least. What else they may do—who can say? A police assault will be necessary to rescue her. I must report to my chief, at once."

The smitten de Vargas was genuinely anxious and excited, yet he must have seen himself rising to command of all the police if so venturesome a lady as Vivian Legrand continued to travel about Spain.

Thus it came about that the combatants of Zucorra, having paused for a dutiful *siesta,* were just about to resume their private form of civil war, when scouts dashed in from the surrounding countryside to warn that strong forces of police and soldiers were converging upon the "bandit village."

News of that nature called for an immediate truce between Tomás Delgado and his foes. All natives of the region, however they might fight one another, could be depended upon to combine in giving battle to the Spanish government.

The steadily increasing rattle of musketry could be heard by Vivian Legrand and her companion in their curious hiding place.

"Other neighbors must be joining in," said Señora Delgado with the casualness of a veteran war reporter.

"No, listen!" Vivian exclaimed. "That chattering sound! Your people haven't got machine-guns—"

"Heavens, the soldiers!" The little woman seemed to grow taller and younger, and Vivian in amazement witnessed a transformation as rapid and startling as any disguise Adrian Wylie had ever contrived.

"Where are you going?" she asked, though the answer was obvious.

"To help fight—fight the soldiers and police," said the mother of Cruz Delgado.

"But they will rescue us, then we'll have this treasure—"

"They may rescue you, *señora*—I cannot begrudge you that. But they will loot the village. Treasure, you say—they won't leave us so much as a hen—not an egg—"

Vivian pried open Cruz Delgado's treasure chest; and while Spaniards in Zucorra were dying to effect her release—or prevent it—she was no less busily occupied discovering what dividend her most recent duel with danger and sudden death might produce.

A real fortune, she found, was packed away in the hidden chest. Bank notes and coins—more than half a million *pesetas!* How to transport it from Zucorra, with or without a police escort, was something which the turn of events would have to help her decide. Growing impatient of her precious but confining place of safety, Vivian at length climbed up through the narrow secret passage and emerged in the house, just as Tomás Delgado and a few of his partizans were preparing to make their final stand.

Vivian, unobtrusive and unseen in the dust and smoke, tried to size up the situation. What ought she do to help her rescuers? What had become of her odd little ally, the wife of Tomás Delgado?

She saw the older woman at the same moment that Delgado himself wiped blood and sweat from his face and discovered her.

Concern about the besiegers of his home dropped from him at a stroke. Vivian saw his carbine swinging up. His expression seemed murderously vengeful as he took hurried aim to shoot her.

With lightning quickness she hurled herself aside, landing behind a massive armchair. The carbine's discharge resounded in the enclosed space of the room. Its bullet tore through the back of the chair, just above Vivian's head.

Her automatic, with the trigger held down, spurted a stream of leaden death across the room.

When the smoke cleared and the soldiers and police, led by de Vargas, crashed in, Tomás Delgado and the last of his belligerent henchmen lay unconscious and dying. Delgado's wife, though still conscious, was mortally wounded also.

"You—you have done for all us Delgados," she gasped when Vivian bent over her. "No—I know you did not mean to shoot me too, and you *had* to shoot Tomás. I—I tried to stand in—in front of him—"

"But you told me yourself that you hated him."

"No woman hates her own man when there is a battle, *señora.*"

"And you are safe, thank God!" Rafael de Vargas exclaimed when he discovered Vivian alive and bearing not even a scratch. "My government will have to put you under bond, *señora,* to keep you out of further dangers."

"Or engage me to help you annihilate other nests of thieves."

"Even so, it was a headstrong, foolish thing for any woman to do—venturing alone into Zucorra," he chided her.

Vivian's green eyes were alight with mischief—or was it anticipation?

"But I love Zucorra!" she cried. "Now that you have cleaned out the worst element, I intend to come here and stay awhile. I mean it, Colonel de Vargas. I adore this old house. I'm going to arrange with Tomás Delgado's estate to buy it and all that it contains."

The Cross Killer *and the* Golden Bier

At that instant, there was the merest shadow of a movement in back of Vivian Legrand

By

Eugene Thomas

For the Vanquished, Death —for the Victor, a Coffin —When Vivian Legrand Matches Wits with the Most Murderous Man in the Wide Reaches of Spain

DFW SHORT NOVELETTE

CHAPTER I

Treasure Chest

GENERAL Count Morales, head of the Spanish police, had come in person to the village of Zucorra because of the near insurrection afflicting that community. Tomás Delgado, lawless parent of the celebrated bandit, Cruz Delgado, with his partisans had stood the siege of their neighbors; but then these Zucorran belligerents had joined forces to beat off the interfering attack of soldiers and po-

lice. Lives had been lost, many more had been wounded. Thus far only Vivian Legrand, known as the Lady from Hell and the most unusual tourist to visit Spain in a century, stood to gain anything from the bloody encounter. But nobody knew about that.

Hidden in a sub-cellar of the home of Tomás Delgado was the loot of his bandit son, Cruz. Having disposed of Cruz Delgado, after saving themselves from his treacherous, desperate plot, Vivian and Adrian Wylie, her accomplished confederate, had deciphered a small drawing found in the hollow handle of the notorious desperado's knife. The cipher marks of that drawing had acquainted Wylie with the true location of the surplus riches Cruz had stolen and had not squandered.

With this knowledge Vivian had made her furtive and hazardous journey to Zucorra, to the very house occupied by Cruz Delgado's parents—the cruel, vindictive father, the sullen, tormented mother. And her journey had resulted in the all-day conflict Spain already knew as the "battle of Zucorra." But Vivian, not even to be distracted by a small local war, had contrived to make use of the mother of Cruz in locating the hiding-place of the dead bandit leader's hoard. Now, she knew where the treasure was, but removing it from Zucorra and then from Spain was another matter. . . .

Adrian Wylie, that loyal and talented lieutenant, had hastened to beleaguered Zucorra with the detachment of mounted police under Rafael de Vargas. And almost the first words Vivian had whispered to her partner when the fighting ended, and she had been rescued uninjured, informed him of the secret success of her foolhardy plot.

"Right here in the depths of this house, Doc," she said. "A chest full of coins and currency. Some jewels, too, I think—didn't have too much time to get up an inventory." She smiled. Vivian could smile even when surrounded by the dead and the dying. The shouts of the conquering Civil Guard the cursing of prisoners, the groans of the wounded undergoing the crudest first-aid — these conditions passed unnoticed by the Lady from Hell.

Hadn't she concentrated on restoring their fortunes, ravaged so peculiarly on the flight from Monteverde in South America? And wasn't she now close upon the track of real wealth once more?

"Right here, eh?" said Wylie with a wry grin. "Nothing to do but borrow an infantry regiment from King Alfonso, to help us cart it out of his kingdom."

"I'll think of a way," Vivian declared. "In fact, I have already. . . ."

She already had confided to the smitten officer, de Vargas, her fondness for picturesque Zucorra. "I honestly adore this fine old house. It must date from the seventeenth century. I'm going to buy it from the estate of Tomás Delgado. I promised his wife, who, poor woman, died in my arms during the fighting, that I would preserve this, her home, just as it had been in her lifetime."

Rafael de Vargas, who had won promotion when Vivian's bullet had finished Cruz Delgado, considered her too lovely a person to be denied any whim. But the veteran soldier, Morales, who was also proud to be numbered among the Legrand admirers, "the most exclusive club in Madrid today," had courage and authority enough to put his foot down.

"It is out of the question, *Señora* Legrand," said the commander of

Spain's police. "I speak both for myself and for the Government. You cannot buy this house or any house near Zucorra. You cannot rent here, or remain here."

Vivian could not suspect this graying and distinguished man. He knew nothing of Cruz Delgado's hidden fortune. If she coaxed hard enough, he would allow her to remain at least a fortnight, a week, three days. . . .

Morales proved obdurate. "I am not only indebted to you, *señora,* for being so lovely and making the world a pleasanter prospect—yes, even to an old soldier's eyes. We are all indebted to you as well for your unbelievable rashness, which has resulted now on two occasions in disposing of some of the worst element of Spain."

"Then, surely, dear General—"

"None of that, young lady. You simply can't remain in Zucorra when de Vargas and his men withdraw. We have all of Spain to police, remember—and these are turbulent times. Forty-eight hours after the last gendarme leaves this vicinity, the bandits and would-be rascals—old, middle-aged and novices—will begin drifting back into Zucorra.

"It would not be safe for you. We can't leave a garrison in a place of this size, you know. We can't fortify cow-sheds and pig-sties. And nothing less than a strong, heavily armed force—such as lately converged on the 'siege' old Tomás Delgado had provoked, and which cost him his life—can continuously enforce the law in Zucorra.

"Oh, I see what you are thinking!" he exclaimed. "You smile. You think I am Morales, head of the police, and I should be ashamed to admit that I and my department can't keep order anywhere. But this is Spain, *señora*—and Spain means tradition. If honest men emigrated to this village, they would soon be infected with violence and stealth, and turn to outlawry. Tradition! Why, even you—should I permit you to reside here—"

"Count Morales!" Vivian's laugh was musical and merry; but in her objection there was the least shade of reproof and injured feelings.

The elderly grandee, a favorite at Court, bowed low over her exquisite ivory hand. "Forgive me, dear *señora,*" he begged. "I was, of course, joking. You are all that is gracious and good."

"Then why shouldn't I try to *reform* Zucorra?"

"With Maxim guns, possibly—not otherwise. You must believe me, for I know. Take the advice of a man old enough to be your grand—ah, your father, *señora.* This part of the province of Leon is not for such as you. I forbid you to try to stay here. I respectfully urge you prepare to return to Madrid at once."

Vivian Legrand met this unaccustomed setback with a captivating shrug of resignation. Gaiety by degrees slipped from her, and she was serious and then becomingly sad.

"Poor, poor *Señora* Delgado," she lamented. "I did so want to stay here, if only to keep the vow I made to the dying woman."

"Any priest—any church in Christendom would absolve you from such a vow," put in handsome young Rafael de Vargas, eager to impress Vivian and also his formidable superior, Count Morales.

With a heavenward glance, the Lady from Hell capitulated. "I dare say you both know best. But at any rate, I can keep my other vow."

"And what, pray, is that?" Morales queried a trifle uneasily.

"To give *Señora* Delgado a splendid funeral, returning her body to the city of her birth."

"But I had supposed she also was a native of this region of traditional outlaws."

Vivian's eyes were thoughtful. They wanted to get away from Spain with the Cruz Delgado money. In which direction would it be wisest to move? Southwest, toward Portugal? Back to Madrid, where her fashionable friends and admirers were an uncomfortable legion? Or north toward France?

In an instant—since she had no opportunity to consult her partner, Wylie—she had made her decision. "With almost her dying breath the poor woman—hers had been an unhappy life—told me she had come as a girl from Santander, and asked if I would promise to see to it that she was there laid to rest, in consecrated ground."

"But, of course—without doubt—a permit can be arranged."

Thinking fast, Vivian clinched her argument. "One sees all things very clearly, I suppose, when at the point of death. *Señora* Delgado knew that her son, Cruz, many times a murderer, had been denied burial in consecrated ground. She doubtless suspected that her evil husband would also be—and so she turned to me, a stranger. . . ."

The Spanish officers, old and young, were deeply moved that so entrancing a woman, and one so recently in gravest peril, should devote her first thoughts, her first activities, to the spiritual concerns of another in no degree related to her, by blood, class, nationality, or any obligation.

"I'll give orders at once," said Count Morales. "De Vargas, find the village priest—if he's been left alive by some of the visiting scoundrels. The funeral and burial in Santander shall be as you wish—at the expense of the State."

"At my expense," said Vivian. "Surely, General, you will allow me that privilege."

Presently Vivian and Wylie had a few minutes uninterruptedly alone. And the latter voiced some of his ironical doubts about this latest Legrand affair for subsidizing religious services.

"Just how much cash do you figure we can spend even on the *madre* of Cruz Delgado?"

"Say one per cent, Doc, of what we're taking away from this house."

"But how—how?" Wylie demanded anxiously. "Morales has put his foot down hard on your scheme of lingering after the police and soldiers withdraw. And you know how energetic Spanish troops and police are said to be when it comes to looting the neighbors. By now, probably, all of Cruz Delgado's *pesetas* are well on their way out of Zucorra, with old Morales even taking his captain-general's cut."

"Nonsense. If the thieves of this village could never locate the treasure, nobody else will be able to, Doc. I tell you Cruz's own mother didn't suspect where he had hid his spare cash till I let her see your interpretation of the cipher on the drawing. Then she led me to the right compartment of the musty old sub-cellar, and together we discovered the chest, whose contents I'd promised to divide with her.

"As the fighting grew hotter, I left the treasure right where it had been hidden. And now when it comes time for my *siesta*, and for a while even Morales won't be expecting to compliment me and hold my hand, you and I can sneak down there and arrange for the getaway."

AS it turned out, the mother of the late and widely unlamented Cruz Delgado received not only a fine funeral—she received a military funeral. And when Vivian assured Count Morales that she had counted on no such pomp and circumstance, he explained in a hushed tone:

"Such precautions are necessary, *Señora* Legrand—as much to protect you, the living, as that poor creature who is dead and already blessed in finding you for her benefactress and champion."

Vivian's green eyes glowed, but were immediately veiled by her long lashes. "You expect more fighting, then? Your police lead a hard life here in Spain, General."

"Indeed, yes. And why not," he said with some warmth, "when we get the sweepings, the scum and worst fugitives of other nations dumped upon us. I intend to prevent fighting, *señora,* by this excessive display of force. And the reason is," he added in a virtual whisper, "a police spy has warned us that Luis Moraga and some of his cutthroats have been seen hovering in this vicinity. They'd raid a funeral procession, a wedding, anything."

"Another bandit?" Vivian asked with well concealed interest. As though she never before had heard of Luis Moraga—though actually she had heard more perhaps than the head of the Spanish police himself. The Count would have been shocked, indeed, to learn that this beauteous lady on whom he showered his debonair, Old World attentions even knew the terrible Moraga by sight.

"Worse than a bandit," Morales was proceeding to explain. "He is wanted in France, and there is a reward of sixty thousand francs posted for him there, dead or alive. This man is known to us as the Cross Killer. The French have a zest for dramatic titles. But in Moraga's case it seems to be wholly deserved.

"Several persons, both men and women, whom he is suspected of slaying on his way up from petty crime, were not only stabbed or hacked to death, but a cross—two deep gashes made at right angles—was cut upon the face of each by the killer as his special, savage brand."

Vivian Legrand shuddered bewitchingly and opened her eyes wide, as the elderly beau had expected her to do. "I sincerely hope we see nothing of this Moraga," she murmured. "And thank you very much, General, for the strong escort."

The Lady from Hell, however, was destined to see Luis Moraga, the so-called Cross Killer, not once but several times. And the first of these unexpected occasions came before the costly and impressive cortège, honoring the mother of Cruz Delgado, even took the winding mountain road leading to its coastal destination.

Vivian—whose eyes were so miraculously keen—spotted a tall, seedy looking loiterer in the crowd of curious and apparently harmless peasants thronging to watch the funeral procession assemble in Zucorra's single street. As soon as she could, inconspicuously, she directed her partner's attention to the man.

"Well, what about him?" Wylie queried. "Some stray Delgado you also want to take pity on?"

"Perhaps you remember a certain Basque we once knew in Paris—by name, Luis Moraga?"

"Luis—Moraga—" Suddenly her partner was electrified. "Good Lord, Vi—I'll say I do. The Cross Killer, you mean—"

"But formerly just a petty thief and hanger-on, who did a few minor jobs for us in the old days."

"And what reminds you of him, for heaven's sake?"

"That tall fellow down there near the hearse which holds not only Cruz Delgado's poor mother, but Cruz Delgado's rich treasure. That tall fellow, Doc, *is* Moraga!"

Now Adrian Wylie might have scoffed at her offhand identification, or flattered himself by exhibiting a hearty masculine skepticism. However, he knew Vivian's intuitions and keenness only too well, had labored with her too long in the vineyards of uppercrust extortion, crime and fraud, even to ignore any hunch she might be playing.

"I hardly can recall anything about Moraga," he admitted. "Maybe it's he, Vi—though how on earth you managed to recognize him like that and instantly place his name beats me."

"Count Morales himself told me a spy had reported Luis Moraga lurking in this vicinity. A fugitive from France, of course, and worth, hoofs and hide, a cool sixty thousand francs —at any French frontier post."

"Let the Spaniards try to collect that," Wylie cautioned. "We've got more than twelve times as much *already in cash* to carry over the French frontier."

During the *siesta* hour, while all Zucorra, troops, police and populace relaxed and slumbered, he and Vivian had descended into the depths of the house which belonged to the late Tomás Delgado. Examining the contents of Cruz's treasure chest had not only excited the pair, who were accustomed to wealth and of late had been desperately conscious of their lack of it, but also gave Wylie the idea of how to implant the treasure in *Señora* Delgado's funeral cortège.

True to his surmise, the locality had proved ill-provided with undertaker's supplies. The best coffin available, brought from Ponferrada, the nearest town, was an altogether cheap affair. Vivian, as the beneficent purchaser, insisted it was not nearly good enough. But more than a day would be lost in telegraphing to Burgos or Valladolid for a more costly substitute. Whereupon Adrian Wylie—encouraged by Morales and de Vargas, who wished to humor Vivian but resisted any prospect of delay—volunteered to "make over" the cheap article from Ponferrada's humble undertaker, so that it would do credit to the sort of funeral arrangements Vivian desired to confer on the mother of Cruz Delgado, who, as she described events in Zucorra, had saved her life.

The process of making over the cheap pine coffin was more a job of decoration than of carpentry. Wylie declined with thanks local offers of assistance. He—under Vivian Legrand's direction—padded and relined the coffin with a rich fabric. There was plenty of costly material to be furtively bargained for in the neighborhood of Zucorra. Generations of thieves, of receivers of stolen goods, had hidden away and had cherished bolts of velvet and brocade as superb as anything brought from the East by the olden-time caravans and argosies of the days of Ferdinand and Isabella.

Señora Delgado in death was to enjoy a splendor utterly unknown to her cramped and unrelenting life. The coffin was artfully encased in black velvet of a texture once reserved for royalty and their robes of state. The cushion-like interior was not precisely soft, but the poor *señora* was, after all, past all

earthly discomforts. In it Wylie had hidden the money hoarded by her son —as though finally the evil-doing Cruz Delgado had elected to share it with her and respect the maternal relationship. Not only was the funeral cortège impressive, therefore, but the pitiful body of the woman whom Vivian really honored as a partisan and friend lay virtually upon a golden bier.

Since the man she kept telling herself was the badly wanted Luis Moraga still was loitering about, Vivian again consulted her partner.

"Do you suppose he has spies in Zucorra, Doc?"

"Very likely. He's the Cross Killer —and so it'd pay him to protect his hide by knowing what goes on."

"Then he alone may have a tip about Cruz Delgado's treasure!" Vivian exclaimed.

"What can he do? Your charms have lined us up a small army to proceed to Santander by way of La Robla, Cervera and Reinosa. No bandit force would dare attack us."

"Suppose he's recognized us as I recognized him? Some of these Civil Guards—and most of the local police —are crooked as they come, Doc. Moraga has connections with them, you can bet, or he'd have been taken and returned to France long ago. If he tips off his friends in the police they'll make it hot for us, demand the lion's share of the treasure."

Wylie remained immune to this alarm. He had done an exquisite job on the coffin, and, craftsman at heart, he was proud and at peace with the world. "Vi, you've let Spain get hold of you. Most of these people are dumb as beetles, Luis Moraga included. You have more wits behind those beautiful eyes of yours, my dear, than all the Civil Guard combined."

"Just the same, I'm going to sick Colonel de Vargas on Luis Moraga."

"As you please. But don't assume Moraga has both learned about the peculiarly secret treasure and also identified us, whom he hasn't laid eyes on for years, and who must in the meantime have changed."

Vivian nonetheless proceeded against Moraga with an excess of vindictive stealth. In him she sensed a formidable adversary. To both de Vargas and Count Morales, her devoted admirers, she spoke of a loitering peasant who jeered at the funeral arrangements and amused the least reverent of the local onlookers with obscene comments and derisive pantomime. And she described the tall fellow who was, she now felt convinced, the wanted Cross Killer.

Thus it turned out that, only a few moments before the cortège was about to set forth forever from Zucorra, a sudden, sharp outcry was heard, and signs of violent commotion agitating the crowd. Two members of de Vargas' mounted force had stepped in close to the agitator Vivian had subtly denounced and abruptly sought to pinion his arms.

But Luis Moraga was not taken. With the swift and desperate energy of the fugitive he had shaken off both his captors. A long knife leaped from his coarse jacket to his bony, murderous hand. One of the arresting officers was fatally stabbed in the chest. The other foolishly tried to grapple with Moraga, instead of using his revolver and firing while he had the chance.

Surging curious spectators closed in around the wounded policeman, and the pair who were struggling for the knife, with grim and silent intensity. The press of people seemed to separate the officer from his prey. And his arm was badly gashed, the right arm—pre-

venting him from belatedly making use of his revolver. When other police came to his relief the tall, shabby fellow seen near the golden bier was no longer to be found in Zucorra.

Two days later the funeral party arrived with due solemnity in Santander. Vivian paid to have the coffin removed to a vault, pending her making arrangements for proper burial and the last rites of the Church.

"Well, we've got the money smuggled along this far, thanks to your ruse," said Wylie. "What's next?"

"Somebody is going to tell me that the cheaper coffin, good as you have made it look, is not suited to the climate of this coast. Then, to keep my promise made to *Señora* Delgado, I'll buy her a fine metallic one. We can afford that, Doc, out of the thirty thousand *pesetas* we've already subtracted from Cruz's cash reserve. I'll say to the local undertaker that I'm sentimental about keeping the velvets and brocade you made use of—old family treasures, and all that! And when you secretly dismantle the first or Zucorran coffin, the treasure becomes ours to carry off to France."

CHAPTER II

A Knife from Behind

FROM the balcony of a hotel in Santander that evening, Vivian Legrand gazed out over the dancing lights of the harbor with a feeling of welcome relief. She and Wylie had come through many dangers since landing in the south, at Cadiz. Yet hadn't they found wealth? The treasure craftily brought from Zucorra was really secure in a guarded vault. She herself—again using the excuse of sacred vows and sentiment—had hired the guards. But in a day or two she and her partner would attend the last rites for poor *Señora* Tomás Delgado, and then, bountifully enriched, they would proceed in safety on their journey into France.

Suddenly, warned by that inner sense that told her so unerringly of the imminence of danger, Vivian swung from the balcony post, against which she had been leaning. And just in time to save her life!

There was a flash of silver in the air before her eyes, and a thrown knife thudded into the post. It stood there, quivering.

Swift as a tigress, Vivian Legrand whirled, and the deadly little revolver that she was never without leaped into her hand. The balcony was deserted. There was only one place from which the knife could have come, the doorway to the corridor. With running strides she covered the distance, and saw, fleeing before her, the slim silhouette of a woman.

The greenish eyes of the Lady from Hell narrowed in thought as she watched the slender back of the woman disappear around a turn in the hallway. That corridor was a blind alley, she knew. And so the woman must have a room somewhere around that turn.

The woman's face had been hidden from view by a black mantilla, but Vivian had seen that she was quite small and wore red shoes. Vivian was positive she had never seen her before.

Her face was grim as she turned back to the balcony. Had she waited a fraction of a second longer to move from that railing, she'd not be alive at this moment. She'd be crumpled on the floor with a knife in her back. Her intuition had been right again, as usual. She had been so sure that their secret was safe, and now this. . . .

Swiftly the Lady from Hell walked

over to the post where the knife still quivered and wrenched it out, her green eyes blazing with sudden fire. There was a yellow-brown stain on the blade, extending an inch or more up from the point. *Poison!*

Something that resembled the cold malignancy of a snake's gaze coiled in the depths of those alert, greenish eyes and rendered them stony, glassy, shallow. Whoever the woman was that had thrown the knife, she was taking no chances on her victim escaping alive. The merest scratch from it would have caused her death.

Vivian examined the blade carefully as she walked down the corridor to the room occupied by Adrian Wylie, her companion in crime. The knife was of Spanish manufacture. By balancing it in her hand she knew that it had been made expressly for throwing. She nodded—the picture was now taking form in her mind.

Wylie looked up from the desk where he was working as she entered. Swiftly she outlined to him what had happened.

"I don't know," she said thoughtfully, "who is responsible." Not once did it occur to her that it might be an agent of the police. She knew better. The Lady from Hell preyed on criminals. The vast fortune that Adrian Wylie and herself had amassed—and lost—had been gained at the expense of the underworld. "I do not think there can be any doubt of the reason," she continued. "Someone is wise to the fact that we have the Delgado loot . . . and that someone means to put us out of the way and take it."

Wylie nodded, running one hand through his gray hair.

"But why attempt to kill you? It seems foolish. If they know that we have the treasure, they certainly know that we are not sufficient fools to leave it lying around where any chance comer might put his hand upon it. If we were killed, there is every chance that the hiding-place of the money might die with us."

"I have thought of that, too," Vivian confessed. "It is either a very stupid, childish move—or a move that has behind it a purpose that we have not begun to fathom."

"Whoever it is, isn't taking a shot in the dark," Wylie said. "They know we've got the stuff."

"Yes," Vivian said slowly. "They know . . . but we don't know who they are. And until we do . . . we're liable to be shot, stabbed or poisoned when we least expect it." She got up from the chair into which she had dropped and paced up and down the floor with catlike tread. To be on the defensive was not a usual state for the Lady from Hell. One of her cardinal principles was to strike first . . . and strike hardest.

Her next words showed that this was the strategy she had in mind. "We've got to find whoever it is and convince them that it would be healthier to leave us alone."

"Santander is a large port," Wylie reminded her drily.

Vivian agreed. "I know. But not too large to find the place you seek, if you have a guide."

"A guide?" Wylie stared at her in astonishment.

She nodded again. "Whoever it is, isn't playing a lone hand. And they, whether two, or three, or four, must meet somewhere. It may be in a hotel room, a park, or a restaurant. The chances are they'll meet tonight after the attempted murder—to concoct a new plan. And if they do, I mean to be there."

"And," Wylie said with a shake of his head, "I suppose you intend to utilize a crystal ball or a fortune teller to find out just where these people are to meet?"

"No, common sense," said Vivian. "The woman who tried to kill me has a room around the bend of the central corridor. She was tiny and she wore red shoes. There are probably not a great many women answering that description along that particular stretch of corridor.

"You have unusual skill with stubborn doors, Adrian. By a process of elimination we can boil down whatever suspects we may have to the woman in whose room we find a pair of small, red shoes. Every time she leaves the hotel we'll follow her until she meets her confederates. And then"—there was a hardness in her ordinarily musical voice—"there will be fireworks."

VIVIAN was fully aware of the fact that she walked straight into the heart of danger.

The street into which the woman she was trailing had turned was a canyon of sinister shadows. The green eyes of the Lady from Hell darted from left to right, her ears attuned to the sound of the stealthiest movement. At any moment, she realized, a revolver shot might shatter the stillness of the Spanish night, or a knife come hurtling from the shadows to sink between her shoulder blades. She had not the slightest inkling of the identity of the people she was fighting, save for the woman that she trailed; while they, on the other hand, might be, and probably were, fully aware of her identity.

The woman ahead turned into a black little street, opened a door where light gleamed through the painted green glass. Vivian's eyes narrowed. Had her suspicions that the Spanish underworld was attempting to muscle in on the treasure she and Wylie had acquired in Zucorra needed confirmation, the café that the girl had just entered would have confirmed those suspicions. The Posada Tres Hermanos was not the sort of place recommended to even the most inquisitive visitor to Santander. Many of its habitués were smugglers, and a fair percentage of cutthroats could be found at its tables any night.

The Lady from Hell slowed her pace, halted for a moment to permit the slouching figure that had been moving from one pool of darkness to another to catch up. It was Wylie, following Vivian as a reserve force in the event of trouble. His ears barely caught the whispered phrase from the woman as she stood in the fringe of a shadow.

"Doc, she's in there," Vivian whispered. "I'm going in."

Wylie did not pause in his stride. But Vivian knew that he would remain outside there, ready to render aid if needed.

She shot a glance through the grimy little window. The woman she followed was nowhere in sight. Vivian opened the door and went in.

No one apparently paid any attention to the lovely woman with the aureole of flaming red hair. But she was instantly aware of eyes beneath lowered lids that took in her plain black gown—her rich fur cape. Eyes that summed up and appraised. A chain of eyes surrounded her. And she was warned of the hands that went with those eyes,

However, the deadly little automatic she carried hidden away should be more than a match for the knives of any of these men. And the hint of latent cruelty that lay in the depths of those greenish eyes might have warned

a close observer that the woman herself could be as dangerous as the weapon she carried. Not for nothing was she called The Lady from Hell!

A tall, slender man with up-curled mustaches came with swift, gliding feet to make her welcome.

She asked for a private room.

The man's hands went up in a gesture of disappointment. There was only one private room and that had been engaged. But he would give her a table in a corner where she would be secluded. He pointed to a table in a little alcove next to the outer door.

Vivian shook her head, and indicated a table at the far end of the long room—a table only a few feet from the only other door, save that of the kitchen, through which the girl could have gone. Undoubtedly the door of the private room where even now members of the Spanish underworld might be planning to rob her and Wylie of the Delgado hoard.

The man seated her there. For nearly fifteen minutes she sat, giving no sign that she was other than a woman there on a rendezvous. Not for an instant did she seem the cool, calculating woman that Wylie knew, not once the deadly adventuress that she actually was.

Suddenly Vivian's hand tightened upon the stem of her wine glass, slightly spilling the golden Manzanilla she had felt compelled to order. With a startled intensity she recognized the man who had just entered. Luis Moraga! So he had come to Santander from the mountains near Zucorra!

He entered the establishment with the swaggering assurance of one very familiar in such company. The greeting of the proprietor gave evidence that Moraga was very well known. Yet only a single word was spoken by Moraga. The proprietor spoke briefly in reply.

Moraga was now making straight for the door near which sat the Lady from Hell. It was a tense moment. She had turned in such a way that she felt sure the newcomer would not see her face. She was badly cornered, indeed, if he should chance to recognize her. For to Vivian the small, crooked pieces of the picture puzzle were dropping into place. She understood now who her chief enemy was, and how the Cruz Delgado treasure which she had begun to think so safe was threatened by forces both of cunning and ferocity.

While she felt her neck and shoulders tingle, Luis Moraga passed close to her. His glance swept the back of her head with arrogant indifference. Some woman who waited for her sweetheart meant nothing to the terrible Cross Killer with a golden treasure flaming in his mind. And so without recognition Moraga swept past Vivian, opened the door and went in.

For a moment or two she sat there quietly, until the proprietor passed from the room into the kitchen at the rear. Then, with a swift movement, Vivian was on her feet. Noiselessly she opened the door and slipped through.

She found herself in a narrow corridor which ended in a curtain-masked doorway at the far end. Light filtered around the edges, and from behind came voices.

She crept to the curtain and peered through. Seated about the table was the woman she had been following, Moraga and two others.

For the first time Vivian had a close look at the woman who had tried to kill her. The glow from the single overhead light revealed her coils of glisten-

ing black hair, the dark eyes, olive skin and white teeth of the typical Spaniard.

"You are late, Luis," she was saying to Moraga as Vivian peered intently through the curtain.

"And what of that?" he snapped. "I could get here no sooner. And I see it in your eyes—you have failed."

Carlotta's shrug was meant to match his insolence. "That woman has the luck of the devil, Luis—"

"I warned you that she is often called the Lady from Hell. What happened?"

"The dagger and the poison, as you ordered, Luis. But she threw herself aside by instinct—I swear it. I hadn't made one little sound, there on the hotel balcony. And so"—another graceful shrug—"she made me miss."

"Better than you, *querida,* have tried to beat her and have failed. But I—I shall not fail," Moraga boasted, stimulated by the girl's dark eyes and admiring glance. "I'm afraid that my affection for you blinded me to the faults of your plan. The Legrand woman is the guiding spirit, and it seemed sensible to believe that, with her completely out of the way, it would be an easy thing to learn the exact hiding place of the Delgado treasure from her companion.

"Somehow I find myself glad now that you failed. The Legrand woman may not be the only one who knows just where the treasure lies hidden. And so," he pursued, "I've got a better plan. Keep them here in Santander. Stop every means of exit—ships, motor roads, trains. Let it gradually dawn on them how dangerously we—the unknown—threaten their very lives. Then get them to agree to bargain—and, of course, Luis Moraga's terms will be *all* the treasure in return for sparing their foolhardy lives.

"It turns out well, then, *querida,* that your knife went wide. That will worry and frighten them with an unknown enemy. A few more strokes of this kind, and Santander will seem too hot to hold them. But then the play is ours. They will learn, in threatening, secret ways, that there is no escape."

One of the other men in the room leaned forward, a puzzled expression lining his swarthy, evil countenance. "Suppose, Luis, they go in disguise. You told us yourself when you came from Zucorra how you know this man, Adrian Wylie, and that he is noted in the underworld for his devilishly clever disguises. We can't halt automobiles, search ships and go through departing trains, examining the passengers as though we are police."

Luis Moraga's laugh was like the public bragging of a dictator. "I have thought of everything, I promise you," said he. "Thanks to the Syndicalist and Anarchist troubles in Catalonia and elsewhere, everybody, native or alien, who travels in Spain must carry a police identity card.

"My spies have seen Wylie and the Legrand woman showing their cards. She's so thick with doddering old Morales, she has a kind of special pass. It is pink, an unmistakable thing. And no matter how disguised, since they are not any longer afraid of the police because they have all kinds of pull in Madrid, they will not bother to change their identity cards. Do you see?

"My men henceforth will cover every barrier. They can't leave Santander without showing the pink cards. And my fellows will be on watch, not for the pair the way they look today, but for any man and woman showing Morales' special permission to travel."

Luis Moraga paused in an elaborate ceremonial, lighting himself a cigarette.

"And that is my plan. What have you to say—any improvements?"

"No, none. It is the best plan. But suppose right now word came from a spy, Luis, that the pink identity card had been seen. Suppose Wylie and this Lady from Hell, as you say, were going to leave aboard ship. What could we do soon enough to help us get at the hidden treasure?"

"It is a fair question, Pedro," the leader reflected. "And here's the answer. I happen to know that not even a coasting steamer is due to sail for the next two days, a fortunate circumstance proving that luck is with us. But if they should be going aboard a ship, and were taking much luggage, then I would guess that they have the treasure with them. I have had a warrant forged, accusing them of robbing the home of the late Tomás Delgado. I have a police sergeant well paid, and he would go aboard with the warrant . . . but merely instruct them to return to their hotel. That lets him out—the warrant may not be in order, you see—and that is enough, since it is merely necessary that they *remain* within call in Santander."

"And if they do not take much luggage, Luis?" queried Carlotta.

"We judge then, *querida,* that they know where the treasure still is hidden and are going after it. And spies quietly go along with them, the rest of us following."

"But not even into France!" she exclaimed.

Moraga flashed her a dark and burning glance. "Hardly into France," said the Cross Killer. "But Cruz Delgado never buried any of his loot in France. He did not take it when he fled that time to South America. No—it is here in Spain, and my feeling is—right here in Santander. The wife of Tomás Delgado, I have learned, was born near Zucorra—at Villafranca. Why, then, did the Lady from Hell decide to make this seaport the old woman's 'native place'? Because there is some big profit in it—and also she is scheming to get away from Spain.

"I, remember," he boasted, "was once her partner. Before—before she worked with this con man, Wylie. I know her. I know how hard it is to get the best of her. In fact, except for the plan I have made—I doubt if we should ever lay hands on the loot of Cruz Delgado."

CHAPTER III

Trapped!

BACK in the hallway the green eyes of Vivian Legrand were smouldering in the darkness. Moraga's *was* a good plan, none could decide that better than herself. She and Wylie had congratulated themselves on their close acquaintance with Count Morales, which had earned them the special police permits, and which they were already planning to have stamped, preparatory to their leaving Spain for a foreign destination.

Vivian's attention snapped back to Luis Moraga as the door on the opposite side of the room swung open. The proprietor of the Posada entered quietly. Vivian watched alertly as he made his way to the side of the Cross Killer, bent and whispered something with hardly disguised eagerness.

Somewhere inside of her that little warning bell of intuition rang one of its more urgent alarms!

"Have him brought in here," Luis Moraga said loudly. "I prefer to talk with him in here. . . ."

The proprietor nodded, smirking, and withdrew. Moraga turned to his

companions, but waited, in seeming thought, before he said:

"What I have just heard changes our plan somewhat."

Carlotta sprang impatiently to her feet. "The Legrand woman's leaving?"

"Wait—be still. Something has come our way to make things much, much easier," Moraga sneered.

Just at that instant there was the merest shadow of a movement in back of Vivian. Her nerves went molten with tenseness. But before she could make the least move the blade of a stiletto pierced through her dress and pricked the flesh of her back.

She made no sound. She could feel the needle-sharp point dig in. It was icy cold and then warm and moist, and she knew that she was bleeding, though the thrust was as delicate as expert surgery.

The shock of being discovered had taken her breath away. She was in a trap, and a desperate one! The message brought in by the proprietor had warned Luis Moraga of her lurking close by in the passage.

The tip of the blade was pressing into her back, urging her forward. And to wheel or try to resist meant instant death. Forward she went, reluctantly, a step at a time. And the knife kept pace, its lightly painful pressure never increasing, never relaxing.

Then, with a sudden, characteristic gesture of defiance Vivian swept the curtains aside and entered the room. Close to where Luis Moraga was sitting she halted, her narrowed eyes turning from his exultant face to Carlotta's and then to the others seated there.

She met all their wondering stares steadily and calmly. She had five to deal with now, counting the unseen adversary, who stayed directly behind her, holding the dominant stiletto at her back. However, there were six cartridges in the automatic she carried concealed in the folds of her ample skirt. . . .

"*Señora* Legrand, you cannot imagine what pleasure your visit gives me," said the leader with affected courtliness. "It's so kind of you to try to save us needless trouble and labor—and bloodshed."

Some glittering spark in Vivian's eyes seemed abruptly to remind him that, though she was trapped and hopelessly outnumbered, she did not appear to be really afraid.

"Here, hold her fast," he commanded, springing to his feet. The stiletto point did not swerve; but the two other men crossed the room at once and seized Vivian by her arms. Carlotta also moved near, awaiting orders.

Moraga nodded. "Search her, *querida*. She's bound to be armed." And Carlotta, grinning her malice, made a quick and yet humiliatingly thorough job of the searching.

"Ah, Luis—see here!" she cried, producing Vivian's favorite automatic. That small, treasured weapon had polished off the murderous Cruz Delgado when he attempted to bury her alive. It had been her faithful, accurate ally in countless tight corners.

Without it now, Vivian Legrand felt helpless, stripped and naked.

"Maybe we ought to keep on searching her. Don't we owe it to ourselves, Luis?" one of her malodorous captors jeered. And then Vivian's jade eyes rested upon him for a moment, and he recoiled. Denizen of the lowest underworld that he was, he could not stand the impact of her murderous glance. It actually seemed to him to shorten his days.

"Shut up, Pedro," said Moraga. "Go and sit down—all of you! You, too, *Señora* Legrand."

Vivian, however, stood perfectly still. Though the sharp blade no longer pricked her, she felt the near presence of the fifth, the unseen opponent. He mistrusted her like Moraga, and awaite any emergency.

"*Señora,* if you have listened, as you must have done, you know how much our plans concern you," Moraga began with a smirk. "We propose to exchange your life and Wylie's life for the Cruz Delgado loot which you have obtained by some trick or other. Skipping a good deal of what I intended—since you are good enough to come here, and without police escort—we can strike our bargain right away."

The agreeable tone of the fiendish murderer's voice did not deceive Vivian. She recalled that Luis Moraga, from the petty crook once hired by her and Wylie, had risen to his current notoriety by taking the savings of French servant girls and then carving the victims up, and putting his brand—the crossed knife slashes—upon them for the police to discover.

She realized acutely that she must spar for time, while endeavoring to think of some cunning counter-stratagem.

"You are wrong," she said. "I know little about your plans. I came here, following her—" and she pointed to Carlotta, who jerked back her pretty head, uneasily— "because, without provocation, she flung a knife at me. I am ready," she added in a curiously submissive tone, "to hear what you have to suggest. What bargain?"

Was this the dread Lady from Hell? Carlotta curled her painted lips in a self-satisfied sneer. However, a flicker of wariness in Moraga's dark eyes informed Vivian that, as she had suspected, he was not one easily taken in. With him she would have even to excel her performance against Cruz Delgado.

"The bargain is this," said the leader. "Tell us where we can put our hands on Cruz's treasure. At least a million pesetas that double-dealer must have gathered together, cheating his own band the way he did. . . ."

"Hardly six hundred thousand pesetas," Vivian answered with casual amiability. "You see, my friend—even in death, he cheats!"

"You admit you have the treasure?"

"Why not," she shrugged, "since you seem to know." Vivian smiled a quiet smile, as if to herself, as if she were recollecting something very pleasing, far away from this sordid scene. She swayed a little as she stood before Moraga. The smile went away and her green eyes turned expressionless.

Moraga cleared his throat, then rapped with his fingers on the arm of the chair. Carlotta was growing restless. Vivian's exceptional beauty was only too apparent. At the moment she might still represent to Luis Moraga a fortune, six hundred thousand pesetas. The savings of a thousand serving wenches! But when, Carlotta was wondering, would Moraga's keen eyes remind him that Vivian Legrand was the loveliest woman he ever had seen?

Vivian herself was wondering something very similar. And Moraga—what was Moraga wondering?

"YOU had better take a seat, *Señora* Legrand," the Cross Killer urged after a long moment of thoughtful silence.

"To be sociable, you mean? Hardly, my friend. You seem to forget I'm a prisoner here. These people—these

scurrying rats of yours, Moraga"—and she looked hard at the girl, Carlotta—"they have been too damned free with their knives, I think. While I'm a prisoner I prefer to stand. Though, of course, I suppose you can force me to pretend I relish this interview."

Her graceful form was swaying again, just perceptibly, and her eyes were low-lidded and discreetly mocking.

Moraga sought to concentrate upon the intoxicating thought of six hundred thousand pesetas. Yet there was Vivian, the Lady from Hell, celebrity of the international underworld, and arguing in every curving line of her exquisite being that Hell was a fashionable watering place—like Trouville, Biarritz, or Cannes—and she its veritable queen.

"You will tell us—tell me," he deliberately amended, "how to find this Delgado money. And when I know you have spoken the truth, I'll guarantee on my oath, *señora,* to put you and Wylie safely across the frontier of France. Or aboard any vessel you like—sailing for England, France, America . . ."

Vivian had been watching each of her opponents through narrowed eyes. It was the fidgeting and utterly ignored Carlotta who suddenly gave her the warning signal to spring into action.

The Spanish girl's eyes were handsomely large and dark, and they seemed to darken and grow larger. She opened her mouth, starting to cry out. But no sound came. What was it that she saw?

Vivian guessed—and so Vivian acted. . . .

Graceful as a frightened antelope, she whirled about and dodged the stiletto holder, whose surprise was a kind of paralysis. Beyond him the curtains masking the doorway were bulging peculiarly, quivering almost as from a supernatural touch. And then a loud banshee wail issued from behind the billowing curtains—an incredible, eerie sound that mingled on the instant with a shrill yelp uttered at last by the stricken, superstitious Carlotta.

Luis Moraga sprang to his feet, as did the others. Vivian was already past the only member of the band who had been standing, the short, swarthy one, now seen by her for the first time, who had thought to block her retreat. Into the curtains she lunged, parting them deftly.

The interruption had come from Adrian Wylie. Vivian had immediately sensed that. Wylie, the scholarly aid who personally had no use for violent measures, yet who never in all their years together had failed her in a pinch!

He had staggered into the Posada, feigning drunkenness, to learn how Vivian was faring on her rash mission. Not seeing her, he had become alarmed and so he had adroitly worked his way to the rear of the crude establishment. Thus it had come about that he got into position to surprise Moraga and the others, just as a few minutes earlier Vivian herself had been overtaken by a surprise stroke.

Wylie well understood the superstitious nature of the average illiterate Spanish peasant. He had therefore resorted to the ancient ruse of making an eerie sound, an uncanny wailing noise, to launch his reserve attack.

"Quick, Doc!" Vivian gasped as the doorway curtains spread apart. And she felt the welcome chill of a heavy weapon thrust, ready to shoot, into her outstretched hand.

Round she swung, a new Vivian, a tigerish Lady from Hell, to challenge

her recent tormentors. So swift were these events, not one of the five in the room had managed as yet to draw a gun. Vivian's own small automatic lay where it had been tossed aside, on the center table; and now Carlotta leaped to grab it up.

"Don't be a fool twice in one day!" Vivian snapped.

Her heavy revolver exploded loudly in the confining space of the small back room. The slug kicked up splinters from the table top, and the splinters tore at Carlotta's smooth, olive-tinted forearm. She drew back with a cry. The automatic stayed where it was.

The man Pedro was taking aim with a knife. Vivian knew well the symptoms, the arm motion. She fired a second time, and Pedro collapsed like an ox, with a .45 slug in his chest.

"Come on, Vi," Wylie urged, moving his own weapon in a slow, menacing arc to control Moraga and the two other ruffians. "Nothing more to be done here. And there's a lot more of this kind of tough sitting just outside—"

"But first, Doc, I want back my gun," said Vivian Legrand. Her gesture was imperious. "You there, Luis, hand it to me."

Moraga seemed to grasp her subtle and savage intention. And so he obeyed her with a sardonic, courtly bow.

"My compliments, *Señora* Legrand! You shoot well, and you shoot to kill, eh? As Cruz Delgado, I hear, found out? . . . If you expected me to make some move, giving you the excuse to shoot me down in self-defense —but no, you see, I fool you, *señora*— I simply oblige and hand over the little gun."

The poise of the Cross Killer was superb. Vivian's manner toward him changed so abruptly that even Wylie, her most devoted adherent, who surely knew all her moods, was stunned with bewilderment.

"You are smart, Luis," she smiled. "That is good. Doc, you must remember Luis Moraga—an old side-kick of ours in the Paris days, long ago?"

"Moraga—why—why—yes, Vi, to be sure," said her partner, recovering his breath and, though wondering, playing up.

"Don't you think Luis is just the right man to get us and our share of the Delgado fortune safely out of Spain?" she said.

"Our share?"

"Naturally, Doc, we'll have to split with Luis if he and his mob pitch in and help us fool the police."

Carlotta started jealously to interrupt. Moraga turned, quick as a cat, and struck her, knocking her down. Back swung his foot, to kick the prostrate girl. . . .

"No, wait, Luis," Vivian objected. "We've no time to waste. Get up, Carlotta—and keep a civil tongue in your head. This is strictly business."

"And what does the *señora* propose?" Moraga asked, turning back to her with another courtly bow, grotesque, indeed, in view of his recent brutal demonstration. "You say we shall split the Cruz Delgado treasure?"

"If you serve my friend and me faithfully, Luis—remembering the old days as I do. We admit needing help, and being strange here in Santander—"

"Where the treasure is?" he asked overanxiously.

"Say rather where the key to the treasure is, Luis."

Vivian had him completely enthralled. He was thinking of the treasure, but also of this fascinating woman who seemed to his conceited nature

to go with the treasure. Suppose he played his cards just right. Wylie was no adversary worth mentioning. He would, of course, need to dispose—yes, dispose—of Carlotta. Then he and Vivian, on the profits of Cruz Delgado's years of fruitful, daring banditry. . . . Moraga's dark face took on a swarthy flush . . . it was a heady wine, his thoughts, making his pulse leap!

"Come on, Doc—I'm tired. Let's be going," the Lady from Hell put in suddenly. "Moraga, beware of trickery. If I trust you, well—I know how to repay the loyal—and punish the treacherous. Come and see us tomorrow at our hotel." And then she added a taunting remark which she could not have resisted speaking: "Carlotta is stopping there, too, as you no doubt know. I shall only detain you a short time, Luis, discussing the business of the treasure."

His attempt to be gallant was next door to servile. "But I am at the *señora's* disposal, remember, for as long as she may need me," the Basque desperado proclaimed.

Vivian gestured with the .45 she still pointed defensively. "Maybe then you'd better prove it, my Luis," said she, "by lending that pal of yours I had to shoot some first aid."

The man Pedro groaned.

CHAPTER IV

A Full Coffin

BACK at last in their hotel, Adrian Wylie fired the question he had all this while been withholding: "Speaking, Vi, as one whose breath you often take away, may I wonder what the devil you plan to do with a sewer advertisement like the Cross Killer?"

"I once knew a man who enjoyed *spending* sixty thousand francs," said the Lady from Hell.

"Good Lord! Not meaning, in addition to everything else, you're scheming to drop Moraga into the laps of the French police?"

Vivian's smile had faded and her expression was not a little sinister. "I hate Moraga and am a bit afraid of what he still can do to us here, Doc." Quickly she repeated every word that she had remembered of the conversation she had overheard before being surprised in her eavesdropping. "Besides—I've got a sore spot on my back where that cursed stiletto prodded and pricked me. You'll have to put an antiseptic on it, Doc. And because it was Luis Moraga who drew first blood in his war upon us, I believe he is bound to die. The French want to guillotine him. But if we can't arrange a deal on that basis, I fancy I'll kill him myself—for nothing."

Next day, however, when she welcomed Luis Moraga to their promised "conference," there was not a trace of this enmity to be detected in the gracious manner of the Lady from Hell.

"How is it," she inquired with seeming admiration, "that you can come here openly, in the broad light of day? I hadn't expected more than a message from you till after nightfall."

"But, *señora,* I have the police of this place in my pocket," he boasted. Which confirmed Vivian's own private impression and explained her eagerness to drop Moraga into a pocket controlled by herself. "And now—your plan—how are we to work together, collecting Cruz Delgado's treasure?" he urged.

"What I know," Vivian explained, "I know from Cruz's own mother. Cruz confessed the hiding place to her

and to one other, an old priest. It is really in the priest's house—"

"And where is that?"

"See here—" With elaborate caution Vivian disclosed to him a paper, old and rumpled, on which her talented partner had labored late into the night. It was actually a dummy of the original Cruz Delgado drawing, taken from the hollow knife handle. And it purported to locate the treasure in the cellar of a house occupied by the alleged priest. It even located the house.

"This is very near the French border," said Moraga.

"You fear that, then?"

"I fear nothing. But I am not on good terms with the frogs."

"After the twentieth murder, the Sûreté gets sort of frenzied, eh? I don't want you to run foolish risks, Luis."

"Only this priest is a danger, *señora*—we shall have to kill him."

"You'd even kill a priest to get at this loot?"

"But I did once kill a very saintly man, *señora*. It was really nothing to me. In fact, a waste of time, for all that I gained was a few altar vessels. Silver, not gold, you understand!"

Vivian's green eyes were shining, and the conceited monster believed that his boasting was already endearing him to the Lady from Hell.

"Well," said she, "that takes care of the priest who guards the treasure, Luis. Now we come to the matter of the coffin. *Señora* Delgado must be buried here in Santander, that has been arranged. I have had her body transferred only today to a fine metallic coffin. The one which came from Zucorra we need on our expedition."

"I do not understand. A coffin—the *señora* jokes a little. No?" Then the accomplished murderer hastened to apologize when he saw his intended fair one frowning. "I did not mean—"

"Where are your wits today? You had them last night."

"It is that girl, Carlotta. Quarreling, nagging—she is jealous."

"Never mind. Listen to me—we can't move into a village, strangers—just like that, go to the priest's house and kill him, and search the house, and ride away with the treasure worth more than half a million pesetas."

Instantly he was on the alert. "You said six hundred thousand, *señora*. For my share I'm counting on three hundred thousand."

"Not one peseta of which you will get, Luis, unless you handle this just as I say. We can't take the body of *Señora* Delgado to the French frontier, because the Spanish authorities expect a burial service here in Santander. But if some other person died, and was to be buried there in the frontier village—and if the old priest who holds Cruz's secret was asked to officiate, service to be held in his home—how long would that allow us to search and find the treasure?"

Moraga was jubilant, and Vivian, behind those greenish, veiled eyes, was thinking—the fool is swallowing it all.

"I understand now the great plan, *señora*. I apologize. And I am ready to do my part. You first need a body to be taken by train to the frontier village—and the rest should be easy. I'll provide the body."

"At once? Whose?"

"If the *señora* has no sentimental objection, I'll kill the girl, Carlotta. . . ."

Vivian had very urgent objections. It would be all too easy to have this ruthless renegade's infatuation for herself involve her in the girl's homicide as an accessory before the fact.

"A coffin, and I have one already," she insisted, "can be shipped empty. We'll meet near the village at the frontier, Luis, and fill it with stones. That will do nicely—and you can resume your practice of homicide after we divide the treasure."

His eyes flickered oddly, and for a moment she believed her sarcasm had been understood.

"Let's settle all the details here and now," she said. "Just arrange with your gang so that Doctor Wylie and I can leave Santander unmolested. We'll provide the coffin. You travel by a different route. And to show you, Luis, that I like you and mean to play fair—you can keep half of the drawing of the priest's house which I obtained from Cruz Delgado's mother, when she lay dying."

While he smirked, sure of his conquest, she tore the faked drawing—hardly yet a day old—in two equal parts.

"All goes well!" he cried. "And you, *señora,* are adorable. . . ."

"Compliments can wait. But remember, you're to make sure that your people and the underworld of Santander do nothing to delay the departure of Wylie and myself for the village close to the French frontier."

FORTY-EIGHT hours later, to their admitted amazement, Wylie and Vivian arrived almost within rifle shot of their goal—France—carrying along the treasure laden coffin.

"It's too good to be true—too easy to be really safe," Adrian Wylie objected.

"After all the risk and thought we have given it, and all my playing on Moraga's vanity like a pipe-organ—what do you mean, too easy?" Vivian retorted.

At dusk, strictly according to plan, Luis Moraga joined them at the roadside tavern. He was bubbling oved with good cheer.

"Here is my half of the secret drawing," Luis exulted.

"And here is our half. Now—about weighting the coffin—" Vivian began.

Moraga was all eagerness to outdistance Wylie in her presence. He sprang forward and, before either of them could object, began tugging at the lid of the empty coffin.

"Wait!" exclaimed Wylie.

"Let him alone, Doc," said Vivian.

Luis had the coffin lid off. His ejaculation was a blend of amazement, suspicion and wildest glee.

"*Señora*—you were really joking about the priest—"

"I'm a great joker, Luis. That's one murder I'm afraid you can't count upon. But wait—don't risk another joke. Bend down, my friend—run your hands through that stuff, coins and cash. More than seven hundred thousand pesetas!"

And the Cross Killer, hypnotized by her words, her compelling beauty and his own lusty greed, did bend down, running his hands through the hoard.

The arm of the Lady from Hell swung up, and down smashed the revolver butt. And into the coffin tumbled the loathsome fellow, slack and insensible, tricked and beaten.

"You bind and gag him, Doc," said Vivian coolly. "Then we'll fasten down the lid. Oh, there are air holes bored in it. . . . I'll see about hiring a motor car to drive on into France. I guess I've thought of just about everything. Wired Count Morales to wire the French police that Luis Moraga was 'heading' their way."

"Did you, really, Vi?" her partner murmured. "And after all this clean-

up, will you consent to a long, restful vacation—something pretty close to an honest-to-goodness retirement?"

"Yes," said she with earnest simplicity. "Dealing with rats like Delgado and now this Moraga has given me an overdose of underworld, Doc—as you must be rightly happy to hear."

FRANCE admitted them, and Frenchmen welcomed them. With just a degree of misgiving, Wylie and Vivian Legrand found themselves ostentatiously escorted to the headquarters of the commandant of the frontier police.

"Madame Legrand, I am enchanted!" that gracious gentleman exclaimed. "I have had Count Morales' wire about you. And what is this—about Moraga? Have you taken him prisoner? If so, you'll be agreeably surprised to learn that the reward has gone up—like shares on the Bourse. It's now seventy-five thousand francs."

"Dead or alive?"

"But certainly. And where is he?"

"Alive—but hidden in a coffin, sir," Wylie said. "Just a little ruse in crossing the frontier, Moraga's pull with the Spanish police being rather a troublesome commodity."

"As we have good reason to deplore. Morales in Madrid does all he can, of course, but—"

The coffin lid came off, and Luis Moraga was dragged forth. Vivian and Wylie transferred the Delgado cash to their personal luggage, packing clothing instead in the coffin to cushion their prisoner.

"It is Luis Moraga all right, and the guillotine is sharpened for him, the unspeakable killer—"

"Wait, sir," an official interrupted. "This man is really in very bad shape. Seems to be suffocating from the gag."

"Strip it off him, then," the commandant ordered. "Send for Doctor Massard at once."

Wylie spoke softly to Vivian. "Those are not *my* knots. Did you tamper with the gag?"

"Do you honestly want him *not* to be gagged, Doc—and to talk to the French about us?"

The police surgeon came and examined Luis Moraga.

"The gag nearly suffocated him—it's the Cross Killer himself, Massard," said the commandant. "A great capture!"

"Nearly suffocated, sir? This man is dead. . . ."

"What," said Vivian Legrand, "can you expect from a coffin?"

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